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DRAGON

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Editorial:
De Planes, De Planes!

By Christopher Perkins

Illustration by Julie Dillon

About a year ago, I had a half-baked idea for an adventure set in the planar city of Sigil. The adventure, titled "Broken Ring," would open with one-fifth of the ring-shaped city being obliterated, and floating amid the wreckage would be the Gatehouse—the city's insane asylum. How it survived and who caused the explosion would be the mysteries the PCs had to solve. The Bleak Cabal (nihilistic keepers of the asylum) would surely take credit, but I envisioned the true culprit being one of the asylum's deranged prisoners, whose deep contemplation of the mysteries of the multiverse led to a philosophical truth so profound in its implications that the thought alone caused the catastrophe. It's a crazy notion, to be sure, but very much in keeping with the core themes of the Planescape® setting.

Time prevented me from moving forward with the idea, but Greg, Stan! and I still wanted a planar-themed issue to pull together a number of articles in the works, including a character themes article tied to three Planescape factions, a History Check about Iggwilv and her demonic paramour Graz'zt, an article about Shemeshka the Marauder (one of Sigil's fiendish movers and shakers), a collection of planar magic items, and an Ecology article about modrons.

The planes have changed quite a bit since the early days. The Great Wheel, with its Astral, Ethereal, and Elemental Planes, was rolled to one side to make way for the Astral Sea, the Elemental Chaos, the Feywild, and the Shadowfell. As we forge ahead and begin contemplating the planar truths of D&D® in its newest incarnation, one wonders what will become of the Great Wheel and the 4th Edition cosmology. Will the game go back to its roots, will it preserve the 4E approach, or will it propose something new?

The answer is yes.

D&D is not truly D&D without the Great Wheel, but for many players and DMs, the 4th Edition cosmology is their preferred "take" on the planes. We also have campaign settings with cosmological needs of their own. Our goal with D&D Next is to present a planar toolbox that allows us to borrow or assemble whatever cosmological elements suit our needs, and yours as well. You'll see lots of references to the inner and outer planes of the Great Wheel, as well as references to planar reflections of the natural world, namely the Feywild and the Shadowfell. But our underlying goal is to let the campaign setting determine the cosmology, be it one of yours or one of ours. What will your next campaign cosmology look like? I'm betting it'll look nothing like mine, and that's no catastrophe.

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History Check: The Iggwilv–Graz'zt Affair

By John "Ross" Rossomangno

Illustration by Eva Widermann

The History Check series explores the rich history of the Dungeons & Dragons® setting. Each installment provides new insight into the game's iconic personas, organizations, and events, untangling the contradictory threads of history when possible. Throughout the text, sidebars present what characters might know based on a successful skill check.

Here we look at the entwined histories of Iggwilv, the Mother of Witches and author of the infamous *Demonomicon*, and her sometimes rival, sometimes lover, the demon prince Graz'zt.

No Love Lost

"There is nothing unusual about a man searching for his lost love. I can see it in your eyes. Someone you

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care about has left you in the dark, and you need my help to find her.

"Be at ease, my friend. We already know of her. You will no doubt be surprised to learn that we seek her as well. Perhaps sharing our knowledge can lead to an end we both find beneficial. You see, my cousin is due to return late this evening, and I expect him to bring news of your lost love's whereabouts, for though she can elude you, she cannot elude us.

"Do not scowl so. You must recognize and embrace the notion that we are hunting her. But do not be troubled, my friend. Until my cousin's return, I will impart to you a tale of another love affair to pass the time. Many bards consider it the greatest love story the multiverse has ever known, for it reveals the unsettling foundations of desire. It speaks to the dark origins of love and our desire to possess that which is beyond possession.

"Now, as I relate to you the tale of Iggwilv and Graz'zt, let your mind wander. Reflect on the love that possesses you. Remember her words and actions, and then ponder what your future holds."

THE ZAROVANS

The narrator of this History Check is a member of the Zarovan tribe of the Vistani, mystical wanderers who can cross the planes as if walking between rooms. The Zarovans place great value in the future, which is made relevant by the past, and they might share their lore with giorgios (non-Vistani) in exchange for an open mind, dark secrets, or mysterious long-term favors.

More information about the Vistani can be found in *Player's Option: Heroes of Shadow*™, the boxed set *The Shadowfell: Gloomwrought and Beyond*™, and the Vistani articles in *Dragon* 380.

That Old Black Magic

"Let us begin with our fair maiden. She has been known by many names over the years: Natasha, Hura, then Tasha, and finally Iggwilv. Ah, that name stirs your memory, does it? I'm sure you've heard it only in passing—you seem a devout fellow with farmer's hands, rather than the sort who discusses the conjuration of demons. But perhaps a relation of yours is a student of the Art? And your lost love—did she dote upon him? No matter. You are too wise, I hope, to dabble in such darkness.

"Iggwilv is known as the Mother of Witches and is the one whose hand penned the *Demonomicon*. Her title, I dare say, is somewhat undeserved, for Iggwilv was the adopted daughter of Baba Yaga, the true Mother of All Witches. Now there is a name with which you are certainly familiar.

"But Iggwilv's dark tutelage only began within the halls of the crone's infamous hut. After a period of youthful rebellion, looting sealed vaults of arcane treasure meant to be kept from ill-intentioned mortals, Iggwilv turned her eyes to deeper, darker mysteries.

"She ingratiated herself with the archmage Zagig Yragerne. The potent wizard was unprepared for a weapon as simple as desire, and soon he turned a deaf ear, and the occasional malicious polymorph, on those who openly spoke of his scandalous relationship with his apprentice.

"Under Zagig's instruction, Iggwilv's obsession with the Abyss and its inhabitants flourished. The two successfully called forth the abominable Prince of Deception, Fraz-Urb'luu and imprisoned him in the bowels of Castle Greyhawk. Although Zagig meant for his apprentice to learn about the care and caution necessary when handling summoned fiends, Iggwilv took further instruction from the trapped demon. She extracted countless secrets from the whispered lies and half-truths the Prince of Deception spewed while he vied for his freedom.

"After wringing everything she deemed valuable from Zagig and Fraz-Urb'luu, Iggwilv took her leave in the night, but not before pillaging her loving master's library. The greatest prize that she absconded with was the *Tome of Zyx*, a seminal text of magic that became the basis of Iggwilv's *Demonomicon*. By stealing his work and then subsuming it within her own, she robbed Zagig not only of his possessions but also of his accomplishments.

"Hmmm . . . your troubled look returns. Surely it is not due to talk of fell and forbidden objects stolen in the night? Perhaps it is only the nature of the betrayal, cruel and unexpected? I'm certain that Zagig also wondered how early in their relationship this plan had formed in his lover's mind."

HISTORY CHECK

A successful DC 25 Arcana check or DC 30 History check reveals Iggwilv's relationship with Zagig and her eventual betrayal, as well as her interactions with Fraz-Urb'luu in the development of the *Demonomicon*.

Courtship and Calamity

"When Iggwilv fled from Zagig to the Yatil Mountains, her desire was simply for more power and more control over the world around her. And her choice of abode was not mere chance. The lost mage Tsojcanth was believed to have been laid to rest in those mountains. Few mortals knew that Tsojcanth was a half-demon who masqueraded as a mortal for years

and that his talent for deception was inherited from his father, Fraz-Urb'luu.

"Using the knowledge of binding she had taken from Zagig and her conversations with Fraz-Urb'luu, Iggwilv engaged in a monumental contest of wills with Tsojcanth and emerged victorious. Bound to her, the half-demon did Iggwilv's bidding for many years and provided her with further insights into the fiends of the Abyss.

"Armed with these new realizations, Iggwilv called forth the demon prince Graz'zt and imprisoned him. Unlike with Fraz-Urb'luu, whose essence was bound in a bas-relief, or Tsojcanth, who was confined to ancient caverns beyond the reach of all, the Dark Prince's physical form was available to Iggwilv, and his handsome visage fell under her gaze daily. As she pried information from him to expand upon the *Tome of Zyx* and thus develop the first entries of the *Demonomicon*, Iggwilv discovered that she could tolerate the presence of no one but Graz'zt. He alone was worthy of her attention.

"Iggwilv became known as the Witch Queen, ruling over Perrenland at the foot of the Yatil Mountains. And though it was the power of her imprisoned demons that made Iggwilv invincible, she counted only Graz'zt as her consort during these years. The rare few who set foot in her court and survived spoke of the Dark Prince seated beside her. But make no mistake—he was bound to her will then just as he was when she first dragged him from the Abyss.

"Iggwilv and Graz'zt bore a son, the foul-hearted Iuz. This abominable offspring would go on to inflict immeasurable harm upon the world, but we need not concern ourselves with the spawn of this unholy coupling . . . at least, not just yet.

"Perhaps it was Iggwilv's belief that she had mastered Graz'zt in the same way she had enthralled Zagig that led to her complacency. Or maybe she had finally succumbed to the same desires she once wielded so cunningly. Either way, the Dark Prince's inevitable betrayal caught her by surprise.

"Thanks to her frequent summoning rituals, a rift into the heart of the Abyss beneath Iggwilv's sanctum began to swell dangerously. Graz'zt proposed a means of sealing the breach using the bound essence of the oft-neglected Tsojcanth. Iggwilv concurred, but when she undertook the ritual, the half-demon she believed to be cowed lashed out with nearly overwhelming ferocity.

"Graz'zt reveled in the struggles of his mistress, and when she emerged, horribly weakened but victorious, he struck at her without mercy. Their titanic battle is said to have shaken the foundations of the Yatil Mountains, for the couple's passion fueled their hatred as powerfully as it did their desires. Even Iuz, attempting to separate his warring parents, was torn asunder into his human and demonic halves.

"Finally, Graz'zt broke free of his lover's hold and returned to the Abyss. Iggwilv, in turn, was left shattered and nearly stripped of power. One wonders if the Dark Prince's ordeal left him without the strength to strike a final, decisive blow, or if Iggwilv's survival was a conscious preference. Was it a kindness or a cruelty to leave her abandoned so? In your current state of heartache, you might not be the one to ask."

HISTORY CHECK

A successful DC 20 History check reveals Iggwilv's rule of Perrenland, knowledge of her stronghold in the Yatil Mountains, and her support of Iuz. A further successful DC 30 Arcana or History check exposes her capture of Tsojcanth and Graz'zt, her harnessing of their power, and the final struggle that allowed Graz'zt to escape.

Living in Sin

"Iggwilv was certain that Graz'zt would not forget her abuses at his expense, despite whatever they might have shared. As she struggled to rebuild her power and recover the arcane treasures lost when her demesne crumbled, the Mother of Witches lived in fear that the demonic agents of Graz'zt would locate her. Soon enough they did—whereupon they dragged her away to the triple-layered realm known as Azzagrat to be subjected to the Dark Prince's cruel whims.

"While I have sullied my tongue with the names of fiends in this tale, I have no intention of speaking of the abominable depravities that took place in the most hopeless dungeons under the city of Zelatar. Yet from these wretched acts a new understanding was born, along with other monstrous offspring. Iggwilv would often be seen in public with child, but such states were inhumanly brief, and Graz'zt took great pains to keep the identities and whereabouts of his offspring hidden from enemies.

"Graz'zt and Iggwilv had come to understand that they loved nothing more than hating each other, and they hated nothing more than loving each other. To the dismay and detriment of the Dark Prince's consorts, Iggwilv was set free to roam the halls of the Argent Palace and scheme at the side of her one-time prisoner, former lover, and recent captor.

"Her counsel and extraordinary knowledge of demonology guided Graz'zt's campaigns of manipulation and conquest. Iggwilv frequently banished trusted advisors of the Dark Prince's enemies to the material world, where they would wreak untold havoc. Such was her power that she could summon entire legions of lesser demons away from the field of battle, leaving Graz'zt's enemies with insufficient forces to withstand the Dark Prince's assault. These displaced demonic legions would appear elsewhere, enraged and bloodthirsty, leading to the fall of nations in the natural world.

"Graz'zt jealously set out to destroy any fiend that had trafficked with Iggwilv in the past. As demented as it sounds, he viciously attacked Fraz-Urb'luu solely because the demon prince of deception had also been Iggwilv's prisoner and plaything at one time—a 'privilege' that Graz'zt no longer wished to share with anyone.

"Because Iggwilv and Graz'zt were forever wary of each other's machinations, trust was in short supply between them, if it existed at all. Nevertheless, the couple often held fast purely to spite those that sought to sunder their dysfunctional bond. Graz'zt frequently dangled Iggwilv before his foes like a prize, daring them to be seduced by her, and then victimized them with the secrets his consort gained from pillow talk. Throughout this series of trysts, Iggwilv stoked the fires of the Dark Prince's jealousy higher and higher, each time leaving it unclear whether she truly would betray him.

"The halls of the Argent Palace swirled with rumors. Many were truths born of the pair's twisted treatment of each other, but some were lies sown by political and romantic rivals. Numerous enemies sought to drive a wedge between them, fearing that if the Dark Prince and the Mother of Witches were united, they had the potential to dominate the Abyss layer by layer.

"It was the machinations of yet another demon in mortal form, Tuerny the Merciless, that finally broke the depraved bonds between them. To spite Graz'zt and obtain Iggwilv's aid with schemes involving her son, Iuz, Tuerny neutralized the magic that held Iggwilv under the Dark Prince's power.

"A cataclysmic battle raged through the Argent Palace, but neither Iggwilv nor Graz'zt was willing to deliver a decisive blow. Instead they each laid waste to halls of priceless treasures, slew favored servants and concubines, and traded venomous barbs in unholy tongues. Each held some of his or her power in reserve, recalling their weakened states following their previous struggle.

"Graz'zt finally granted Iggwilv safe passage from Azzagrat. A host of demonic servants conveyed her research on rituals and amassed relics to a manor somewhere in the Astral Sea. As demonic separations go, this is as close to amicable as one could hope for, given those involved, wouldn't you say?"

HISTORY CHECK

A successful DC 25 Arcana check or DC 30 History check allows a character to recount Iggwilv's capture, the couple's "reconciliation," and details of the campaign of deception and conquest waged against their enemies. It also provides knowledge of their ruinous separation.

Precarious Balance

"And now there is only a smoldering aftermath, the fiendish pair considering themselves 'even' for all the suffering and petty torments they'd imposed on one another. Few secrets remain between them, and this would be reason for concern if not for the fact that every betrayal could be met in kind.

"Instead, Graz'zt and Iggwilv seem to enjoy starting casual ploys against each other, using agents that they expect will fail in their endeavors. Their rivalry now exists only to remind them that there were once good times. What passes for affection between them are murderous plots and cunning traps.

"Their former game of cooperating to undermine the other demon princes has warped into something more sinister. Both Graz'zt and Iggwilv continue to offer aid to anyone who plots against the other, but one can never be certain the aid is genuine—and the former lovers are never certain, either. Sometimes they willingly deliver schemers to their rival's doorstep like presents. Many adventurers could have saved their skins by knowing, of all things, the important anniversaries of their fiendish quarry. All too late, they often find that they are merely gifts, and not very precious ones at that.

"Meanwhile, the spawn of Graz'zt and Iggwilv wander the planes. Some revel in the power of their parents' reputations, sowing ruin while their enemies fail to act out of fear of reprisals. For the most part, each child is beholden to only one parent, so they are perpetual pawns in the subtle struggle between the Dark Prince and the Mother of Witches. A few of these offspring become aware of their true parentage through happenstance and foolishly seek out their long-lost parents . . . expecting what? Love?

"Tell me, my friend, how far would you go to learn whether you are descended from evil? You see where this is headed. I'm sorry, but the Iggwilv-Graz'zt affair has more to do with you than you realize.

"Do you believe a child born to such parents is anything other than corruption incarnate? Can you find it in your heart to love one who was conceived in the Abyssal womb, and more important, can she love you back? Think on these questions while we search for your lost love. I'm sure that when we find her, you

HISTORY CHECK

A successful DC 25 Arcana or History check reveals the truce-like state, marked with underhanded dealings, that exists between Iggwilv and Graz'zt, and the rumors of their various children scattered in the material realm and beyond.

and she will have much to discuss, and I will have another story to tell."

Hooks

Dungeon Masters looking to integrate the twisted relationship of Graz'zt and Iggwilv into their campaigns can make use of any of the following hooks. For further reading, refer to the *Demonomicon*™ and *Manual of the Planes*™ supplements.

- The offspring of Graz'zt and Iggwilv are often unaware of their true heritage. A player character or nonplayer character who suspects that he or she might be the child of Graz'zt, Iggwilv, or both might seek answers that the Dark Prince or the Mother of Witches would prefer remain hidden. The party becomes embroiled in a plot to abduct the "wayward child." The plot might be orchestrated by one of the parents . . . or one of their many enemies.
- Some of the most potent artifacts and relics in the world passed through Iggwilv's hands before being scattered again during her captivity in Azzagrat. Adventurers might seize upon rumors of such famed items as *Daoud's Wondrous Lanthorn*, the *Prison of Zagig*, or one of the six copies of the *Demonomicon*. Of course, this knowledge places them at odds with the Mother of Witches, who seeks to recover her lost possessions.
- Sages claim that the only creature Iggwilv ever truly loved was her daughter, Drelnza. The child is surrounded by mystery, as the identity of her father and the cause of her vampirism both remain unknown. Interred beneath the Lost Caverns of Tsojcanth by her mother, either as a guardian or for safekeeping, she was slain by adventurers. In secret, the Mother of Witches quests ceaselessly to recover the soul of Drelnza and return her daughter to life, and she employs any means or creatures in this pursuit, including adventurers.

About the Author

John "Ross" Rossomangno is a freelance writer whose previous work has appeared in *Dungeon* and *Dragon*. His early gaming in Greyhawk, as well as his complicity in numerous ill-conceived relationships, granted insight into this article. He now counts himself lucky to be married to a remarkable woman who asks questions like, "What the hell's an Iggwilv?"

Editor
Ray Vallese

Managing Editors
Kim Mohan, Christopher Perkins

Development and Editing Lead
Jeremy Crawford

Senior Producer
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Producers
Greg Bilsland, Stan!

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Illustrator
Eva Widermann

Publishing Production Manager
Angie Lokotz

Bazaar of the Bizarre:
From the Attic of Alluvius Ruskin

By Jim Auwaerter

Illustrations by Zoltan Boros and Eva Widermann

In Sigil's Market Ward, near the Hive, one tower rises above the general clutter of the city's twisted streets. Tivvum's Antiquities serves as a ready landmark for touts and guides to navigate through the ward. Its green marble walls are studded with small windows that occasionally give off multicolored light that cuts through the gloomy murk of the twilight hours. There is no place better in all of Sigil to purchase the keys to unlock the City of Doors.

Those who enter the store find cluttered pathways between a variety of magical and mundane items, nearly all of which are portal keys—each able to open a particular passage at a particular time to or from Sigil. In the center of the store, a wide iron staircase spirals up through five stories of increasingly rare items. The bottom two floors are simple, usually non-magical keys and bits of junk that power some of the more commonly trafficked portals. Going up a floor or two, a cutter can find ever-frozen ice made of water from the river Styx, a matching ring and circlet fashioned from the antennae of a rust monster and, on the uppermost floor, a balor skull inlaid with gems and a fragment of a sterile seed from the world tree Yggdrasil.

Newcomers to Sigil might be surprised to learn that the proprietor of Tivvum's Antiquities is not named Tivvum. An elderly tiefling by the name of Alluvius Ruskin took over from her mentor Tivvum several years ago when he either retired or went off adventuring, depending on which story one chooses to believe. Alluvius decided to retain the shop's name, in part because it is carved along the outer walls of the store, winding up the side.

Over the intervening years, Alluvius (or Lu, to her friends and longtime customers) has not shown her age until lately. She has lost weight, giving her a frail appearance, and her bushy hair has thinned, making her horns appear even more prominent. Despite these changes, her personality is just as cheery, and if anyone inquires after her health, she just smiles and says that everyone gets older someday. She reminds most people of a kindly grandmother.

It's common to hear Lu coming before seeing her. She is a little clumsy and nearsighted, and tends to bump into items scattered around the floors. Her spectacles are so thick that it's hard to see her eyes, and she wears leather gloves at all times. "After all," she is fond of saying, "there are plenty of keys that I wouldn't want to touch by accident." Lu's wits have not dimmed, however—she can instantly identify what any of her portal keys are good for, and if someone has a destination in mind, she will probably know

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how to get there. She also maintains a list of intangible portal keys such as spoken phrases or thoughts, which she sells to those who need them.

Those who try to take advantage of her frailties and rob her are in for a rude surprise. The last berk who thought he'd steal a portal key learned the meaning of the word "defenestrated" when he was thrown out of a third-story window by some sort of golem that formed itself from things around the floor. In an earlier incident, the shop's open doorway proved to be an impassable barrier to a would-be shoplifter, who found herself unable to walk through it while Lu hobbled over and pointed out where on the thief's person the merchandise had been secreted.

Some say that Lu is not as physically weak as she appears to be, and she has been seen demonstrating her knowledge of ritual magic, leading some to wonder whether she also knows some damage-dealing spells. No one seems eager to find out firsthand.

WHAT CAN WE SHOW YOU?

Tivvum's Antiquities is an ideal place for characters to purchase items that you'd like to make available to them, but that might not fit well thematically in a treasure package. Here are a few examples of how to re-flavor some magic items into goods that Lu might sell.

Merchandise	Magic Item
Razorvine knuckledusters	*strikebacks*
A hat topped with a cranium rat skull	*headband of intellect*
A still-mobile glabrezu claw	*grasping weapon*
The hammer of a dabus	*silent tool*
A bag of scales from a rust monster	*rust bomb*

Mimir

"You've probably seen a few mimirs around Sigil already, but this particular grinner also acts as a key to Hestavar. With it, you can go straight to the Swan Tower in the Bright City. Be a nice change of pace from the weather here, wouldn't it?

"It also does everything a normal mimir does, storing all sorts of information and giving it back whenever you ask for it. I got this one here cheap. The leatherhead who used to own it always left it on, and his wife used it to check up on whether he was spending his time working like he claimed, or out at the Sensorium."

Mimir — **Level 18 Uncommon**

This small skull made of an unidentified metal floats near you, ready to respond to your inquiries.

Wondrous Item 85,000 gp

Property

You gain a +4 item bonus to knowledge checks about life on the planes and to skill checks to perform divination rituals.

Utility Power ✦ At-Will (Standard Action)

Effect: The mimir begins recording all sounds that it can detect within 20 squares of it (+13 Perception modifier). You can stop the recording as a free action, and can play any part of the recorded information back as a minor action. The mimir can store an unlimited amount of auditory information.

Karach Armor

"I'm afraid I've got a lot of this armor here. The basher who sold it to me didn't mention that the portal it was keyed to was temporary. It used to lead to a githzerai monastery in the Elemental Chaos, but now . . . well, it's good armor, I'm told. Still, he better hope that he doesn't come back here again. He'll wish that the Hardheads were still around—they'd punish him less than Estavan will. This old biddy's got a few favors to call in, believe you me.

"Oh, yes, this armor. You don't recognize what it's made of? It's not quite metal, exactly. It's called karach, it's formed from the stuff of Limbo, and it can be shaped by the will of its user. You'll never have a better-fitting set of armor."

Karach Armor — **Level 12+ Common**

This armor molds itself to you when it is donned, then seems to shimmer and transmute as you move.

Lvl 12	+3	13,000 gp	Lvl 22	+5	325,000 gp
Lvl 17	+4	65,000 gp	Lvl 27	+6	1,625,000 gp

Armor: Chain, scale, or plate

Enhancement Bonus: AC

Property

This armor has no speed penalty or armor check penalty.

Spellsoul Blade

"There are a fair number of chivs like this one. Each of them was forged for a specific person, and they each have a tiny piece of that person's soul inside. That soul gives the blade its power. A cutter who's holy-minded has a soul shining with radiant light,

Spellsoul Blade **Level 14+ Uncommon**

When you cause this weapon to appear in your hand, you also imbue it with whatever sort of energy your soul desires.

Lvl 14	+3	21,000 gp	Lvl 24	+5	525,000 gp
Lvl 19	+4	105,000 gp	Lvl 29	+6	2,625,000 gp

Weapon: Heavy blade or light blade
Enhancement Bonus: Attack rolls and damage rolls
Critical: +1d8 damage per plus

Property

When this weapon is created, the DM chooses three of the following damage types: acid, cold, fire, force, lightning, necrotic, radiant, thunder.

Utility Power ✦ Encounter (Minor Action)

Effect: Choose one damage type from the three selected when this weapon was created. All untyped damage dealt by weapon attacks using this weapon changes to the chosen type. This effect lasts until the end of your next rest, whether short or extended.

While this effect lasts and you are holding the weapon, you have resist 10 to the chosen damage type.

Level 24 or 29: Resist 15.

Utility Power ✦ At-Will (Minor Action)

Effect: You store this weapon in a secure extradimensional space. You can use a free action to recall the weapon to your hand.

and a Xaositect who got hold of one of these swords made would probably make you half-barmy when he hit you with it. And because the blade's partly made of a soul, you can store it inside your own soul and bring it out when you want.

"When the blood who donated a bit of his soul is written in the dead-book for good, his blade can serve as a key to the location where that person passed away. This blade belonged to a berk who died fighting in a dread domain of the Shadowfell. I don't know how it got out, but if you use it to get back in, you'd better have another way of getting out.

"All these spikes you can come across today are lesser copies of a legendary blade. The way the chant goes, a swordmage from the City of Brass fought with all his being—body and soul—against his foes. When he grew angry, his sword burned with his rage. When he fought for justice, his sword glowed with golden light. The thing seemed to manifest a force related to what he was feeling, from moment to moment. Eventually, he and his special blade became one, with his whole soul contained within steel.

This legendary weapon is supposed to be more powerful than any of its copies, and might work as a key for any of the portals created by its copies. If you find that sword and bring it here, I'd be willing to pay a lot of jink for such a prize."

Modron Toy

"This little gewgaw is one of the most powerful keys I have in the place. It's said it was once owned by the Nameless One itself. You haven't heard that name? Well, the tale's too long for me to tell, but if you're curious, you can go to the Red Tabor inn and look for a rogue modron named Nordom to hear the dark of it.

"Oh, but this here! This toy acts as a key to the plane of Mechanus, and even if you're not in Sigil, it can open a portal to a demiplane near there. The place used to be part of a town on Mount Celestia, till a rogue modron broke it off. Now it looks like a piece of home, at least if you consider a mesh of interlocking gears home. Time flows funny in there—sometimes fast, sometimes slow, though it all seems the same to those inside. Just be careful when you leave—some modrons take offense at those who abuse portals to Mechanus.

"This gadget also can summon a modron to serve you that will treat you as its lawful superior. Those modrons—all about the law.

"The Guvners who moved out of Sigil would give a lot to buy this, but they're afraid to come back after the Lady's pronouncement. If you've got the jink, you might be able to turn a pretty profit by selling it to them. My old bones aren't interested in traveling around to see who's interested."

Modron Toy **Level 23 Uncommon**

This small toy is shaped like a rogue modron. You can manipulate it to bring forth its remarkable powers.

Wondrous Item 425,000 gp

Utility Power ✦ Daily (Standard Action)

Effect: You open a portal in an unoccupied square adjacent to you. This portal leads to a pocket dimension bounded by interlocked gears, about 100 feet on a side. The portal remains open until the end of your next turn.

After the portal closes, the DM rolls a d20. On a roll of 15 or higher, time flows quickly, and 8 hours within the pocket dimension are equivalent to 4 hours outside it. On a roll of 5 or lower, time flows slowly, and 8 hours within the pocket dimension are equivalent to 16 hours outside it.

After 8 hours in the pocket dimension, everything within it returns to the area where the portal opened or to a random location in Mechanus (DM's choice).

Utility Power (Summoning) **✦ Daily** (Minor Action)

Effect: You summon a duodrone balancer in an unoccupied space within 10 squares of you. The balancer is an ally to you and your allies, and acts on your turn.

The balancer lacks actions of its own. Instead, you spend actions to command it mentally, choosing from the actions in the balancer's description. You must have line of effect to the balancer to command it. When you command the balancer, you and the balancer share knowledge but not senses.

When you take a move action, you can also command the balancer to move up to its speed.

When the balancer makes a check, you make the roll using your game statistics, not including any temporary bonuses or penalties.

The balancer lasts until you use this power again, until it drops below 1 hit point, or until it ends its turn more than 10 squares away from the *modron toy*. If the balancer drops below 1 hit point, you lose a healing surge (or hit points equal to your surge value if you have no surges left). You can dismiss the balancer as a minor action.

Duodrone Balancer **Summoned Creature**
Medium immortal animate, modron

HP your bloodied value; **Healing Surges** none, but you can spend a healing surge for the balancer if an effect allows it to spend one
Defenses your defenses, not including any temporary bonuses or penalties
Speed 5, fly 5 (clumsy)

Traits

Implacable
An enemy cannot enter the balancer's space by any means.

Standard Actions

Remove Outlier ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); your level + 5 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + your level damage, and the target cannot score critical hits until the end of your next turn.

Triggered Actions

Probabilistic Understanding ✦ Recharge when an enemy within 10 squares of the balancer scores a critical hit
Trigger: The balancer's summoner makes a d20 roll.
Effect (Free Action): The summoner treats the triggering roll as though he or she rolled a 10.

Impose Order ✦ At-Will
Trigger: An enemy willingly leaves a square adjacent to the balancer without shifting or teleporting.
Effect (Opportunity Action): The balancer uses *remove outlier* against the triggering enemy.

About the Author

Jim Auwaerter is from a village by the Lugotak Sea. He is the author of several recent D&D *Insider* articles, such as "Tools of Two Trades" in *Dragon* 402 and "Monk Basics" in *Dragon* 404.

Developer
Tanis O'Connor

Managing Editor
Kim Mohan

Development and Editing Lead
Jeremy Crawford

Senior Producer
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Producers
Greg Bilsland, Stan!

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Eva Widermann

Digital Studio Consultant
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Graphic Production Manager
Angie Lokotz

Character Themes: Sensates, Ciphers, and Xaositects

By Dave Chalker

Illustrations by Matias Tapia

For the denizens of the planes beyond the mortal world, and especially for those who call the City of Doors home, belief is power. A being's dedication to an ideal shapes more than just his or her personal reality: in the most mutable spaces, it can even shape the ground a planar traveler walks on (or flies by).

The factions that evolved in Sigil and beyond are emblematic of the power of belief. These ideological organizations put their philosophies into practice with every action they take. Although the Faction War (and the actions of the Lady of Pain) weakened their hold on Sigil, the factions still exist. Some hide in Sigil, some retreated to their planar strongholds, while others wander the multiverse and are not shy about attempting to recruit sympathetic travelers to the cause. When belief is power, a shared belief is a powerful weapon.

This article details three character themes deriving from Planescape® factions: the Society of Sensation, the Transcendent Order, and the Xaositects. These themes can be used in games taking place before the Faction War (the setting of the original *Planescape Campaign Setting* boxed set) or in conjunction with modern depictions of Sigil from *Dungeon Master's Guide*® 2 and the *Manual of the Planes*™ supplement. Even if the factions no longer exist as official organizations, their adherents still maintain the power of their beliefs.

The Society of Sensation

"How can you understand anything if you haven't experienced everything?"

Society of Sensation members are referred to as Sensates and often are stereotyped as hedonists, pleasure-seekers, and layabouts. For some members, these characterizations are true. More dedicated Sensates understand that the only way to truly experience life is to seek out variety in all things. Although tasting exotic food and drink is important, it's just as important to understand what it's like to go without even basic sustenance to experience the feeling of deprivation.

Sensates seek this balance. The faction teaches that the only way to discover the purpose of the multiverse is to experience as many sensations, colors, textures, impulses, feelings, smells, and sensory inputs as possible. Only when every possible moment is experienced will the truth become clear; a

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CHARACTER THEMES

Your character's theme is a career, calling, or identity that describes who he or she is in the world. Just as race and class create basic definitions about who your character is, theme adds a third character component to help refine your story and identity.

The included themes specifically reference three of the factions from the PLANESCAPE campaign setting, designed to be used in adventures that draw on the campaign setting or that focus heavily on planar travel. Even if a character does not officially join one of these factions, he or she still can embody the philosophies enough to take one as a theme. An elf bard who is constantly on the search for new tastes and sensations might qualify as a Sensate. A human monk who emphasizes the mind and body always acting in concert could be mistaken for a Cipher. A genasi sorcerer who is obsessed with chaos is a Xaositect in spirit, if not in name.

For information on using themes as part of character creation, and rules for how to gain and use theme powers and features, see "Heroes of Nature and Lore," *Dragon* 399.

composite understanding of existence will crystallize to those who have sought out and processed it all.

A lofty goal, for sure, which is why the Society believes that no one has managed it yet. Still, it's hard to argue with the benefits of seeking out new experiences, especially for adventurers and explorers. The Society of Sensation teaches how to turn those experiences toward meaningful use.

Creating a Sensate

The Society of Sensation embraces beings from all walks of life, of any race, class, or alignment. Each member brings different experiences to be shared with the Society, and their diversity provides a plethora of different backgrounds to draw upon.

The sharing of sensations and experiences is not just a metaphor: To join the faction, would-be members must place five experiences from their memories into a "recorder stone," each focusing on one of the five senses. If the offered sensations contribute something to the Society that no current member has experienced, the applicant joins the faction. Otherwise, he or she must explore the multiverse further to gain a unique experience before trying again.

Starting Feature

Sensates feel a rush of excitement when encountering new sensations and experiences.

Benefit: Whenever you use an encounter attack power or a daily attack power, you gain temporary hit points equal to one-half your level.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature

The Society's members work to expand the reach of their senses so that they can truly appreciate all the depths of experience, whether tasting an ancient wine, feeling the heat of pure elemental flame, or gazing into the heart of a newly created demiplane.

Benefit: You gain a +2 power bonus to Endurance checks and Perception checks.

Level 10 Feature

A clever Sensate eventually realizes that there is much more to life than his or her immediate surroundings. The only way to truly experience everything is to seek out new dangers and challenges. Such an enlightened Sensate gains a renewed enthusiasm for challenging circumstances.

Benefit: While you have temporary hit points, you gain a +3 power bonus to all skill checks.

Optional Powers

The more distinctive circumstances you have encountered, the more you understand how to use those experiences to your advantage. At the same time, you're drawn to seek out new experiences, compelling you to seek out more challenging situations.

Level 2 Utility Power

Pain is a sensation, often much stronger and more recognizable than most. Your willingness to experience all variations of pain separates you from a dabbling Sensate, who wants simply to enjoy life.

Sensory Caress — Sensate Utility 2

In a moment of quiet reflection, you open yourself to another's pain.

Encounter
Minor Action — **Melee** 1
Target: One ally
Effect: You transfer one effect that a save can end from the target to yourself. Until you succeed on a saving throw against that effect, you gain a +2 power bonus to saving throws.

Level 6 Utility Power

Sensates keep extensive journals of what they have experienced and what they hope to experience. A city-dwelling Sensate's journal could include taverns visited, gardens smelled, and interesting creatures met. Your journal might include details on monsters battled and injuries suffered.

Been There, Done That Sensate Utility 6

You know the dark of how to deal with predictable sods.

Encounter
Immediate Interrupt **Personal**
Trigger: An enemy hits you with an attack.
Effect: You gain a +2 power bonus to all defenses against the triggering enemy's attacks until the end of your next turn.

Level 10 Utility Power

By the time you've adventured for a while as a Sensate, you've gained a vast array of different experiences from which to draw, whatever the situation. Although it's difficult to find new sensations when you've been through so much, your life experience gives you an edge in dangerous situations.

Breadth of Experience Sensate Utility 10

Variety is the spice of ending someone's life.

Daily ✦ Stance
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: You assume the breadth of experience stance. Until the stance ends, you gain a +2 power bonus to the attack rolls of attack powers you have not yet used during this encounter.

The Transcendent Order

"Would you rather be remembered as someone who thought about action, or someone who took action?"

There is a rhythm to the planes that few can hear. It is all around, permeating every living being, every piece of land and sea, and every act of magic. Yet it often goes muffled and ignored, drowned out by the sound of your thoughts. Only by knowing yourself and unifying thought and action can you exist in harmony with everything.

The Transcendent Order teaches that the path to enlightenment comes from knowing your body and learning to listen to what existence is telling you to do instead of what your mind is saying.

This quality gives the Order's members the reputation for being impulsive, yet they also can be stoic and introspective. This dichotomy, in addition to the fact that they seek all their answers from within, leads others to call them Ciphers, since they can be indecipherable to those not listening in the right place.

The Transcendent Order teaches that action without thought is the most perfect form of action, since that action is taken in harmony with the multiverse. This philosophy does not mean that a Cipher charges in blindly whenever an opportunity arises; it means that he or she attempts to transcend the moment and touch a higher purpose.

Creating a Cipher

Ciphers gravitate away from the extremes of alignment, since moral codes of all kinds imply a measure of analysis. Thus, most Ciphers are unaligned, preferring to worry about their own enlightenment more than the struggles of others.

Training the body and mind to work in perfect harmony appeals most strongly to members of martial classes such as fighters and rogues. The higher level of consciousness that Ciphers strive for also appeals strongly to psionic characters, especially monks. Spellcasting classes sometimes have difficulty combining their studied methods with the Cipher philosophy, though those who do can be highly dangerous adversaries.

Starting Feature

The training of a Cipher stresses quick and unhesitating action. Being able to react to danger without thinking about the response is one of the first lessons a Cipher learns. Though some react to danger by heading directly toward it, others look for the bigger picture and move where the situation dictates.

Benefit: You gain a +2 power bonus to initiative. In addition, when you roll initiative and do not have the highest result, you can use a free action to move up to your speed before anyone else's turn in the encounter.

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature

The Cipher philosophy teaches that creatures gain harmony with the multiverse by tapping into the natural cadence of the planes. By attuning yourself to that fundamental rhythm, you can cause your physical being to become more accurate and precise.

Benefit: You gain a +2 power bonus to Acrobatics checks and Athletics checks.

Level 10 Feature

A Cipher on the path to transcendence begins to understand the rhythm of all things, including the ebb and flow of battle. Being in the right place and striking at the right time can make all the difference.

Benefit: Once per day, you can use a second action point during an encounter.

Optional Powers

Whether harmony comes from practicing your craft while battling demons in the Abyss or practicing a strict regimen at the Great Gymnasium, the more in tune your body and mind become, the more amazing deeds you can accomplish.

Level 2 Utility Power

The first goal of a Cipher is to learn how to act without thinking. Initially, you can achieve this state only for short bursts.

Action Momentum Cipher Utility 2

It's tough to control the mind of a cutter who's not controlled by his or her thoughts.

Encounter
Immediate Reaction **Personal**
Trigger: An enemy hits your Will with an attack.
Effect: You make a saving throw to end one effect imposed by the triggering attack on you, provided the effect has a stated duration.

Level 6 Utility Power

A Cipher who masters the ability to act instinctively achieves the rank of Master of the Heart. You become able to enter an action trance, a state of pure action untempered by thought.

Action Trance Cipher Utility 6

You have learned to place yourself in a state that relies on reflex alone.

Encounter ✦ Stance
Minor Action **Personal**
Requirement: You must have at least one action point remaining.
Effect: You assume the action trance stance, which ends if you spend an action point. Until the stance ends, you gain a +1 power bonus to speed and saving throws.

Level 10 Utility Power

A Master of the Heart who learns to act in harmony with the multiverse can become a Master of the Mind. Your attunement to planar rhythms at this level allows you to understand the transitory nature of impairment.

Master of the Mind Cipher Utility 10

You know that all things must pass, and any hindrance is temporary.

Daily ✦ Stance
Minor Action **Personal**
Effect: You assume the master of the mind stance. Until the stance ends, you can make a saving throw at the start of your turn against one effect that a save can end. If you fail the saving throw, you can still make a saving throw against the effect at the end of your turn. Additionally, when you succeed on a saving throw, you gain 5 temporary hit points.

Xaositects

"Great . . . wheel? Sounds boring. The multiverse is a pile of goo, with some crunchy bits. Occasionally, someone adds salt."

Patterns. Rules. Order. These are tools of the dim and the ignorant use to attempt to codify the multiverse and understand it. Instead, Xaositects (also known as the Chaosmen) believe that the answer is staring everyone in the face: There are no rules, and there is no deeper meaning to existence. Attempting to impose any kind of structure is antithetical to what it all means, and trying to stem the tide of change and disorder puts you farther away from understanding it all and finding your place in the chaotic sea of reality.

If this view is true, does that mean that all reality is meaningless, and everyone should sink into despair? Yes and no. (Or no and yes.) Other factions might wallow in doom and gloom over this perceived futility, but the Xaositects' understanding goes deeper than that. Down into despair is certainly one direction, but a body who embraces chaos is equally likely to float up into happiness, or sideways into the street. Reality is meaningless, but a lack of meaning isn't a bad thing in and of itself. Abandoning a search for meaning is the surest way to find it. The more your

life reflects chaos, the more your life is like the multiverse, and both are sources of endless surprise.

Creating a Xaositect

Chaos is all around you and in you, and never mind those clueless sods who try to ignore the fact. Your purpose in life is to keep everything changing. Whether you bathed in the elemental energies of a chaotic plane or just hit your head too hard, the call of chaos is irresistible.

The Xaositect faction accepts anyone. Excluding a specific race or class would mean making a rule about that prohibition, and creating rules creates a clear contradiction. Sorcerers who follow the path of the wild mage are the most common class—if anything could be said to be common among this diverse and changeable group.

Starting Feature

Xaositects often scramble their speech, making them difficult to understand by those not accustomed to deciphering chaotic talk. They also have the ability to scramble the speech of others. After all, language is meaningless, and they're just exposing it for what it is.

Benefit: You gain the *babble* power.

Babble Xaositect Attack

Geegle dooo bleagh owlbear ron grickle flick tarrasque meat!

Encounter ✦ Charm
Minor Action **Ranged** 5
Target: One creature that can hear you
Attack: Highest ability modifier + 2 vs. Will
Level 11: Highest ability modifier + 4 vs. Will
Level 21: Highest ability modifier + 6 vs. Will
Effect: The target cannot speak intelligibly or deliver any effect that relies on speech (save ends).

Additional Features

Level 5 Feature

Xaositects learn how to appreciate magic, so they can better navigate ever-changing reality. This understanding makes them better at convincing others of the truth of their assertions.

Benefit: You gain a +2 power bonus to Arcana checks and Bluff checks.

Level 10 Feature

Some say the multiverse has rules. You believe the opposite: Any rules that might exist are made to be broken. You have the ability to ignore the rules and roll with any change that comes along.

Benefit: You gain a +2 power bonus to all defenses against opportunity attacks. Additionally, you cannot be surprised while you are conscious.

Optional Powers

Xaositects don't join anything, including their own faction, except when they do. Of those who truly embrace the randomness of all, a gifted few can bring that chaos to their everyday lives—sometimes to the chagrin of those around them.

Level 2 Utility Power

Projectiles rely on several factors: trajectory, force applied, the wind, and so on. A little infusion of chaos makes your enemy's arrow behave unpredictably.

Hornung's Deflector Xaositect Utility 2

A hemisphere of elemental matter manifests around you, deflecting incoming missiles or making you a bigger target.

Encounter
Immediate Interrupt **Personal**
Trigger: You are hit by a ranged attack.
Effect: The attack instead hits a random creature (including yourself) within 3 squares of you.

Level 6 Utility Power

The die is a universal symbol of chaos. In the back alleys of the multiverse, a toss of a die can change the fortune of the lowliest beggar. You believe this principle applies to the gods themselves—they must use dice to dictate the fate of empires and worlds.

The Die Is Cast Xaositect Utility 6

Chaos reigns in every glance, strike, and pose. Those who ally themselves with randomness can change their reality.

Encounter
Free Action **Personal**
Trigger: You roll a d20 and dislike the result.
Effect: Add 1d10 to the roll, and then subtract 1d4 from the roll.

Level 10 Utility Power

The plane of Elemental Chaos demonstrates the ultimate manifestation of the shifting nature of everything. The elements, space, and even time twist in an unpredictable fashion there. With a little practice, you can bring that approach to the battlefield.

Battlefield Shuffle Xaositect Utility 10

Sometimes you just have to toss everything up and hope it works out for the best.

Daily
Free Action **Close** burst 20
Trigger: You roll initiative and dislike the result.
Effect: You and each creature in the burst reroll initiative. You and your allies gain a +4 power bonus to the roll, and your enemies take a -4 penalty to it.

About the Author

Dave Chalker is the editor-in-chief of Critical-Hits.com, a developer for the *Marvel Heroic Roleplaying* game from Margaret Weis Productions, and the author of several *Dungeon* and *Dragon* articles including "Secrets of the Ninja Assassin" in *Dragon* 404. He'd like to thank the authors of the original *Planescape Campaign Setting* boxed set and *The Factol's Manifesto* for some text and inspiration for this article, and he can't decide if he's a Dustman or a Xaositect at heart.

Developer
Tanis O'Connor

Editor
Michele Carter

Managing Editors
Kim Mohan, Miranda Horner

Development and Editing Lead
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Ecology of the Modron

By Brian R. James

Illustrations by Julie Dillon and Victoria Maderna

As any learned blood knows, the Great Axioms of the Multiverse are eternal and immutable; they simply exist and cannot be manipulated. Or so I once believed! I'm telling you now, berk, that the universe we perceive around us is mere illusion, an elaborate construct devised by enigmatic beings beyond our ken.

You've heard of the Far Realm, the plane of nightmares and madness, yes? Well, it has a twin, a realm of law and orderly thought distilled to its purest form. It is from this plane that reason and judgment were born, gifts to us from the Prime Architect. I have communed with the Architect's minions, glorious beings of ordered thought and perfect reason. They appeared before me in the guise of geometric clockwork entities, bizarre hybrids of metal and flesh. They spoke of a vile malignancy spreading throughout their order, a plague of emotion and dissonance that has erupted into a great civil war. Even now, the conflict threatens to spill into our own cosmos.

Listen and heed my words! Everything we believe to be real is a lie. Awaken to the truth before it's too late! The unraveling of our reality is nigh. Pray not to the gods for salvation, for even they are powerless to stop the Great March of the Modrons.

–Ravings of ex-factol Habaro,
the Fraternity of Order

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The March of Time

Living constructs of geometric design, modrons are paragons of absolute order and largely alien to mortal comprehension. Since time immemorial, these enigmatic beings have retreated from the cosmos for centuries at a time only to reemerge periodically on an epic scale—tens of thousands of them gating in from their bizarre clockwork dimension to march a grand circuit across known existence. As planar scholars and doomsayers are quick to point out, the end of the next cycle is nearly upon us. If history is any indicator, a modron incursion is imminent, and woe to any who stand in its path.

Prime Architect

Many cultures of the mortal world have myths recounting the origins of the universe. Though the details of these legends are colored by cultural bias, most share key events, such as the war between gods and primordials. Yet few can recount the story of an even earlier time in the history of the multiverse, the epoch that witnessed the molding of the Elemental Chaos itself.

Accounts chronicled by the Fraternity of Order in Sigil speak of a time in which the Elemental Chaos was still in its infancy, an Age of Creation when primordials shaped and destroyed worlds at whim, unchallenged by the gods. It was an era of wondrous invention on a cosmic scale, but without a framework to give them permanency, these creations were fleeting.

One primordial stood apart from the others. This being's true name is lost to the ages, but Fraternity archives name it the Prime Architect. It is written that this primordial was the first to peer beyond the veil of the Elemental Chaos to behold something Outside—a region of perfect order and harmony the Prime Architect named the Accordant Expanse.

Enraptured by this vision of perfection, the Prime Architect began to shape the Elemental Chaos on a massive scale. The first phase of the grand design required distilling the chaotic maelstrom into four base elements: air, earth, fire, and water. To achieve this end, the Architect enlisted four mighty elemental lords as overseers. As the framework took shape, the elemental lords in turn tasked their subordinates, the archomentals, with crafting the latticework of the final structure, incorporating mixtures of the base elements.

At last the Prime Architect beheld its momentous creation, raw elemental power molded by symmetry and order. By drawing on this cosmic arrangement of elements, the grand creations of the primordials could persist, allowing mortal life to flourish at last.

Rise of the Modrons

Even as the Prime Architect proudly surveyed its handiwork, subtle blemishes began to mar the nascent realms. At first barely perceptible, the minute imperfections began to multiply rapidly, forming fleshlike strands of corruption writhing in bluish slime. The Prime Architect watched in mute horror as a nearby world was dragged into the mass of tendrils and devoured by a colossal wormlike entity lurking within. Finally shaken from its immobility, the primordial moved quickly to intercept the aberrant behemoth before it could chew its way farther out of its dreadful Far Realm.

Fraternity documents are sketchy on the details of this colossal battle with the entity now called the Nine-Tongued Worm, but in the end the Prime Architect proved victorious. Just barely. It was mortally wounded, no longer able to stabilize the Elemental Chaos. It called one last time on the Accordant Expanse, bathing in the cosmic energy of absolute Order. The Prime Architect surrendered its flesh and was re-created as innumerable mechanical life forms, each a distinct entity but inseparable from the whole.

Thus the modron race was born.

The horde of newly created modrons mobilized into a hierarchy, then quickly spread across the cosmos to seal the remaining breaches to the Far Realm. Once this task was complete, they shifted themselves to the Accordant Expanse en masse. There they set immediately to work engineering a home for their kind, a bizarre realm of gears and cogs they named Mechanus.

Year by year, decade by decade, and century by century the modrons toiled, constructing their capital city at the heart of Mechanus. Sixty-four interlinking cogs rest atop each other like a colossal, mechanical ziggurat to form the clockwork metropolis of Regulus. At the heart of their clockwork home the modrons erected a grand cathedral in honor of the Prime Architect. Then, the four highest-ranking among them submerged themselves in a scintillating pool of pure Order and conjoined, triggering an unexpected apotheosis. From the pool arose the vestige of the Prime Architect, given new flesh and purpose: Primus, the One and the Prime.

The Great Modron March

It took the modrons 289 years, calculated to the millisecond, to complete construction of their city. Termed a Grand Cycle, this precise measurement of time equals seventeen standard cycles, each being the seventeen-year period needed for the largest of Regulus' sixty-four gears to make one rotation. At the end of each Grand Cycle, the modrons march forth from Mechanus, thousands upon thousands of them, on a trek through the cosmos.

The purpose of the Great Modron March remains an enigma. No one other than Primus knows it, although the excursions appear to be primarily information-gathering exercises. The modrons have also been observed sealing off or collapsing planar portals and gates along their route, for reasons they have yet to reveal.

The route is determined before the march leaves Mechanus, and the modrons do not deviate from it. Their tortuous path is inscrutable to onlookers, and more than one town has been trampled under the relentless procession. Though unfeeling, modrons are not senseless—they won't fling themselves mindlessly over a cliff, for example.

Each march is unique in duration and route. Some last as little as a few months and cover only a handful of planar sites, while others have gone on for decades and traversed every known region in the cosmos.

A march never stops once it has begun. The lower orders of modrons do not need to sleep, and the others that do push themselves far beyond normal limitations. When one absolutely must sleep, it is carried on a litter .

This cycle of processions has repeated every 289 years, like clockwork—until 189 years ago, when Primus inexplicably initiated the great march early. Unlike all those before, this procession took a senseless, chaotic course through the planes. Many thousands of modrons became stranded in remote corners of the multiverse.

Now the Grand Cycle is once again counting down its final years, and one facet is of particular concern to planar scholars. The recent invasion by plague demons from the malign parallel universe of Voidharrow left countless dimensional cysts eating away at the fabric of the cosmos. Since that outbreak, modrons have been appearing at these sites in numbers as never before. This vanguard appears to be losing the fight against the malignant cysts, and scholars fear that Primus will direct the next Great Modron March through the heart of the planes to eradicate the demonic infestation once and for all.

Physiology

Modrons are a physical manifestation of order. They have a decidedly clockwork appearance, their peculiar geometric bodies fashioned of gears, plates, and rivets forged from rare metallic alloys. Modrons are not wholly artificial, however. Living tissue is inextricably fused with their metallic exoskeletons. Their most disturbing feature is their eyes; great bloodshot orbs that stare uncaringly.

Living Constructs

As living constructs, modrons incorporate both mechanical and biological components; the two are inseparable. Much of their fleshly being is vestigial and nonfunctional, but they retain many features of mortal creatures. The lowest orders of modrons are the closest to purely mechanical beings and do not require sleep; those above them in the hierarchy still need to rest from time to time, though they can go without sleep for long periods when necessary.

Some modrons continually strive to improve the efficiency of their race. These inventive beings are able to finely manipulate the latent power of Mechanus's energy pools to craft spells and devices unique to their physiology. Examples of such modron devices include mechanical limb extenders, magnetic clamps, and winglike appendages.

Sense Organs

Like other living creatures, modrons can sense their environment. The instruments of perception might be fleshly or mechanical, or combinations of the two.

Vision: All modrons have eyes. Hierarchs (see "Hierarchy" below) typically have two, facing forward, while base modrons can have anywhere from one to ten eyes, depending on type. Certain modrons enhance their vision with mechanical lenses, some magical in nature and others powered by psionic energy, allowing vision even in complete darkness.

Hearing: Modrons do not possess auditory organs. Instead, they detect sound through artificial sensors fused to the skull plate or exoskeleton. These sensors are linked, providing acute directional information that surpasses that provided by the hearing of most living creatures.

Scent: Very few modrons have olfactory organs, and these are vestigial at best. Most modrons neither possess nor require a sense of smell.

Taste: Despite having mouths, modrons experience no sense of taste, nor do they require sustenance. They do possess tongues, which they employ for verbal communication. In their home plane of Mechanus, communication is primarily telepathic. Since telepathy is not an innate ability among all modrons, their ability to communicate telepathically on Mechanus appears to be a feature of the plane, but one that affects modrons only. Primus is responsible for this "gift," since it greatly expedites tasks.

Touch: Modron flesh is infused with both nerves and artificial sensors to perceive physical contact. Modrons can feel pain, to be aware of physical harm, but can voluntarily suppress this sensation when necessary. In battle this ability allows them to forget about the damage they're taking and focus on victory.

Circulatory and Digestive Systems

In a mortal creature, a circulatory system (heart, lungs, and blood vessels) is necessary to disperse oxygen and essential nutrients throughout the body. In addition, most living beings have a digestive tract for breaking down and extracting nourishment. In modrons these systems are largely vestigial, since they have no need to eat, drink, or even breathe.

Modron bodies are fueled by a psychomorphic substance found only in the Accordant

Expanse—concentrated, raw cognitive energy given tangible form. This fuel has the appearance and consistency of royal jelly, and it glows with inner luminescence. Little is known about the fantastic properties attributed to this substance, but aberrant entities such as aboleths have been striving for millennia to unlock its secrets.

In Mechanus, the fuel is harvested by modron laborers and collected into vast pools. A small dollop of the potent substance is enough to sustain a laborer for weeks; higher-ranking modrons require a correspondingly larger amount. The ruler of the modrons, Primus, bathes eternally in a vast pool of this gel, in which new modrons are birthed.

Culture

As alien as the forces of chaos can be, the forces of order can be equally strange—if not more so. When dealing with modrons, "order" does not necessarily equate to "logic"—at least, as mortals understand the concept.

Society

To understand modron society, one must abandon the idea of the self. Although each modron is an individual, it is one part of a vast collective and does not grasp the idea of separation. Thus, only scholars who do not observe through the distorting lens of individuality can see the truth. It is said that those able to strip their souls so bare can become modrons themselves.

Hierarchy

Classification is a fundamental tenet of modron society. Modrons assign everything to category, especially themselves. Their society is divided into two primary castes: the base modrons, who are primarily laborers of low intelligence, and the hierarchs, who direct and plan. The base caste contains five ranks, from monodrone up to pentadrone, while the hierarch caste contains ten, including the singular Primus.

A modron is permitted to communicate only with others of its own rank or of adjacent rank. This segregation is not the result of elitism, but a simple byproduct of efficiency. Most modrons are not even capable of comprehending the existence of higher ranks beyond their immediate superiors; likewise, those lower in the hierarchy than their immediate reports simply do not exist to them. For example, a pentadrone considers a decaton to be the ultimate form of its kind and cannot imagine anything greater, but when it looks upon a tridrone, it does not see a modron at all—nor can it even classify what it's observing.

Thus, the very existence of Primus is secret to all modrons other than the secundi who directly serve it. Commands from the One and the Prime are passed down through the ranks, progressively translated into a form that the lower (and less intelligent) forms can comprehend. Whenever a modron receives instructions from a superior, it never suspects that those commands originated even higher up.

From least to greatest, the ranks of the modron hierarchy are enumerated in the table below. No scholar has yet attempted to produce exact figures for the total population of modrons in the multiverse, but they likely number in the millions.

MODRON HIERARCHY

BASE MODRONS	ROLE
Monodrone	General laborer
Duodrone	Skilled laborer
Tridrone	Supervisor
Quadrone	Manager
Pentadrone	Law enforcer

HIERARCHS	ROLE
Decaton	Administrator
Nonaton	Arbiter
Octon	Mayor
Septon	Inspector
Hexton	General
Quinton	Councilor
Quarton	Governor
Tertian	Judge
Secundus	Viceroy
Primus	Absolute ruler

Death and Promotion

Even the size of modron society is rigidly fixed. Each rank contains only a set number of modrons. Should a member of any rank die, available candidates from the next lowest rank are "promoted." In turn, modrons from the rank below fill in the void created by those so promoted, and so on. Monodrones, having no castes below them, reproduce by fission to replace lost members, drawing on the energy of Regulus's central pool.

The transition for a promoted modron is traumatic—not only does it undergo a wrenching transformation into a new form, but the resultant being must also reconcile the knowledge and memories of its prior selves with its current form.

When a modron dies, no corpse is left behind. It simply vanishes, its corporeal essence returning to the central pool, where it forms into a new monodrone. Only in rare regions of "dead space," where the Accordant Expanse does not intersect with the rest of the cosmos, does this rebirth fail. Here, one might find the remains of a dead modron, but such a discovery is exceedingly rare.

Outlook and Psychology

With a given rank, all modrons have a similar appearance, and they think as a collective, but they are not exact copies of each other. Each has unique life experiences that, though subtle, give it a distinct

personality and quirks. Such differences are more apparent among hierarchs than base modrons.

As incarnations of reason, modrons always attempt to bring order out of chaos. Many hierarchs are convinced that with proper study and analysis, they can unlock the hidden logic within apparently senseless phenomena. To most other beings, modrons come across as passionless and frustratingly bureaucratic. Their overriding goal is to organize, clarify, and regiment. They view free will as a blight that must be purged from an ordered universe like an infection.

Modrons are especially concerned with the proliferation of portals across the planes. They see these as weak points in the fabric of the cosmos, riddling existence like worms burrowing through a rotten apple. They insist that anytime a being passes through a planar portal, the very structure of the cosmic firmament is weakened. Thus, modrons have begun to appear at portal mouths to contest the passage of other creatures until they can "repair the wound." Some contingents have started collapsing such passages wherever they find them, no matter the purpose of the portals.

Modrons in Combat

As the vanguard in the fight against entropy, modrons battle chaos and its minions wherever they find them. Slaad lords have a particular hatred for modrons, and their conflicts over the millennia are legendary. Modrons fight without remorse or compassion, using logic and proven battle stratagems to win the day. Individually they are capable warriors, but they are most fearsome when they gather into regiments. Fighting together, modrons form a heartless, unstoppable killing machine. In larger-scale conflicts, modron hierarchs never hesitate to employ wave tactics, sacrificing thousands of base modrons to achieve their objective.

Rogue Modrons

Like cancer in a living body, disorder can strike individual modrons. Such uncontrolled modrons might go rogue. A few rogues develop identities and seek objectives apart from Primus's desires, but others malfunction or keep following old orders.

Such an event is most common among base modrons. Since hierarchs are each composed of multiple modrons, all of a hierarch's constituent modrons would need to malfunction before it went rogue.

Other modrons hunt down and capture rogues, which are then either destroyed or subjected to an arduous regimen of rehabilitation. This process strips away all memories of being an individual, and most rogues do not survive the experience.

Rogue Modron Companions

Rogue modrons make interesting companions for the characters. A rogue modron might join a party of adventurers for any number of reasons. It might wish to study the characters and see what makes them tick; it might need protection against superiors who seek to rehabilitate it; or it might be confused and searching for purpose beyond what modron society has to offer. Some rogue modrons, given the chance to explore their individuality, desire to belong to something greater than themselves, and the adventuring party becomes a temporary substitute for the order and structure that Mechanus provides.

Rogue modrons have trouble understanding emotions or concepts such as friendship, loyalty, and deception. They are, however, able to think for themselves and arrive at certain conclusions based on first-hand observations and experiences. A rogue modron might ally with a group of adventurers out of a desire to learn more about other creatures in the multiverse, but once it believes it has nothing more to learn, it moves on. Thus, modron companions are often "flighty" and can leave the party without so much as a goodbye.

Rogue Monodrone **Level 4 Defender**
Medium immortal animate, modron

HP 52; **Bloodied** 26; **Healing Surges** 13 **Initiative** +5
AC 21, **Fortitude** 17, **Reflex** 17, **Will** 17 **Perception** +4
Speed 5

Traits

☼ **Deflective Defender ✦ Aura** 1
Allies have partial cover against ranged attacks while in the aura.

Implacable
An enemy cannot enter the monodrone's space by any means.

Standard Actions

⨭ **Short Sword** (weapon) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +11 vs. AC
Hit: 1d6 + 5 damage.

Wall Tactic ✦ At-Will
Effect: Until the start of the monodrone's next turn, it is immobilized and gains a +5 power bonus to all defenses.

Minor Actions

Battle Wrath (stance) **✦ At-Will**
Effect: The monodrone assumes the battle wrath stance. Until the stance ends, the monodrone gains a +2 power bonus to the damage rolls of basic attacks using a weapon.

Defend the Line (stance) **✦ At-Will**
Effect: The monodrone assumes the defend the line stance. Until the stance ends, whenever the monodrone hits an enemy with a basic attack using a weapon, the enemy is slowed until the end of the monodrone's next turn.

Str 16 (+5)	**Dex** 16 (+5)	**Wis** 14 (+4)
Con 19 (+6)	**Int** 12 (+3)	**Cha** 12 (+3)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment short sword

Rogue Duodrone	**Level 8 Defender**
Medium immortal animate, modron	
HP 76; **Bloodied** 38; **Healing Surges** 13	**Initiative** +8
AC 25, **Fortitude** 21, **Reflex** 21, **Will** 21	**Perception** +6
Speed 5, fly 5 (clumsy)	

Traits

☼ Ordered Defense ✦ Aura 2
While in the aura, enemies take a -2 penalty to attack rolls against creatures other than the duodrone.

Implacable
An enemy cannot enter the duodrone's space by any means.

Standard Actions

⊕ Halberd (weapon) **✦ At-Will**
Attack: Melee 2 (one creature); +14 vs. AC
Hit: 1d10 + 7 damage. If the target shifts before the start of the duodrone's next turn, the duodrone can use this attack against it as an opportunity action.

Minor Actions

Cleaving Assault (stance) **✦ At-Will**
Effect: The duodrone assumes the cleaving assault stance. Until the stance ends, whenever the duodrone hits with a melee basic attack using a weapon, one enemy adjacent to it other than the target takes 4 damage.

Measured Cut (stance) **✦ At-Will**
Effect: The duodrone assumes the measured cut stance. Until the stance ends, whenever the duodrone hits an enemy with a melee basic attack using a weapon, the duodrone can shift 1 square as a free action.

Minor Actions

Modron Shift ✦ Encounter
Effect: The duodrone ends any slowing or immobilizing effect on it and shifts up to 5 squares, ignoring difficult terrain.

Str 17 (+7)	**Dex** 18 (+8)	**Wis** 15 (+6)
Con 19 (+8)	**Int** 12 (+5)	**Cha** 13 (+5)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment halberd

Habitat

Modrons are not creatures of the natural world, nor are they even native to what most think of as the cosmos. The clockwork realm they call Mechanus is just one of many bizarre realities that coexist within an even greater planescape that scholars name the Accordant Expanse.

Kin to other anomalous planes such as the Far Realm or the Plane of Mirrors, the Accordant Expanse exists outside the comfortable structure of the cosmos. Its inhabitants claim their reality to be the true universe and all other existence to be a mere construct of their invention, a malignant wasteland of chaos and emotion. The rare individuals who claim to have gazed through a breach to the Accordant Expanse describe the divide as something akin to a shattered mirror—beyond the broken reality shards lies a vision terrifying for the mortal mind to process.

Mechanus

A plane of rotating gears and clicking cogs, inextricably linked together with massive pulleys and stretching in all directions as far as the eye can see.

Mechanus is a great void filled with unimaginably huge wheels, each interlocking with the next, like the internal cogs of an ornate clock. The plane is filled with thousands of these clockwork disks, the largest having a diameter of more than 1,000 miles. The slow revolution of this titanic wheel is picked up by adjacent cogs and transferred to others throughout Mechanus, setting the entire plane in motion.

Both surfaces of each circular realm have their own gravity, so disks can meet at right angles without disturbing the inhabitants of either one, and creatures on opposite surfaces of the same disk are drawn to the surface by their own gravity. The void between wheels contains breathable air.

Mechanus Traits

Type: Extraplanar realm (the Accordant Expanse)

Size and Shape: A cube-shaped void roughly 10,000 miles on each side, filled with many interlocking gears. The upper and lower reaches of the void are bounded by a thick metallic casing.

Gravity: Each massive clockwork gear has gravity relative to its horizontal plane. The bounded walls of the realm also have normal gravity.

Mutability: Divinely mutable (Primus). Primus is able to shape Mechanus at its whim.

Mechanus is a plane of ultimate law, the very antithesis of the Elemental Chaos and every bit as alien to mortal minds as the Far Realm. Light and dark exist here in equal measure, as do heat and cold. All matter here has its place, where it remains irrevocably. Mechanus harbors no passion, illusion, or pain. Individual consciousness is temporary, serving only while needed and then subsumed into the whole.

Regulus

Sixty-four interlinking cogs at the heart of Mechanus form the metropolis of Regulus. The cogs of the modron capital rest atop each other, like a colossal, mechanical ziggurat. An enormous rod runs through the center of each sector gear and is apparently the agent of rotation.

Each sector is ruled by an octon and periodically inspected by a septon, which in turn reports to a hexton, and so on, until the report reaches a quarton regional governor. Deep in the heart of the modron metropolis is the government sector, Regulus Prime.

PRIMUS: THE ONE AND THE PRIME

An enigmatic being of godlike power, Primus alone sits at the pinnacle of modron society. As both the supreme ruler of modrons and the literal embodiment of the race, Primus represents the ideal of perfect logic. Its true goals remain inscrutable, but many presume it seeks to spread logic and the rule of law throughout the multiverse.

In its natural form Primus is a being of gargantuan size, dwelling within the pool at the apex of its tower in Regulus. Humanoid in shape, Primus is silent and impassive, its face devoid of emotion. Its upper torso and head appear fashioned of solid gold, its lower body fading into the energy of the pool.

According to obscure planar lore, individual modrons are merely components of the vast distributed body that is Primus. At the end of each Cycle, the One and the Prime undergoes disassembly and renewal. This process gives rise to thousands of new modrons, replenishing those that perished in the preceding Cycle. The new Primus, formed from one of the secondi that attend it, spends some time familiarizing itself with its new existence, then begins directing underlings according to its inscrutable plan.

A century past, the One and the Prime met an unscheduled demise. Seeking his lost rod, the demon lord Orcus infiltrated the tower of Primus and disintegrated the supreme ruler with a word of power. Orcus then bent the modrons to his foul purpose. Once the would-be god had gleaned all he desired, Orcus cast off his façade and abandoned the leaderless modrons. Yet, as has happened innumerable times before, a secundus quickly rose up to claim the mantle of the One and the Prime and restore order.

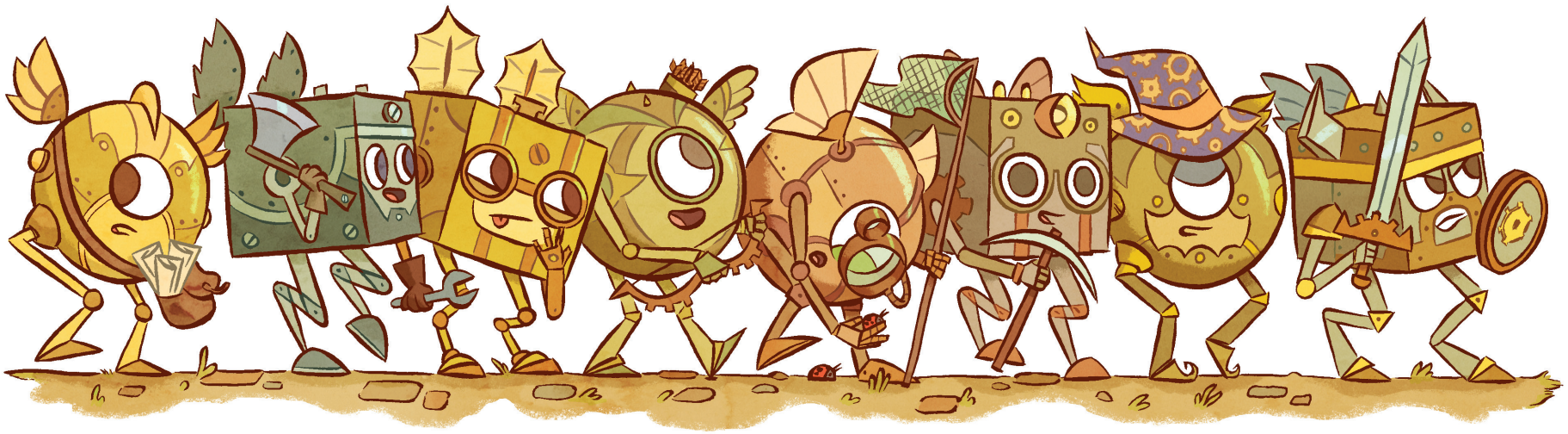
This new Primus, seeing Mechanus invaded, its city in ruins, and its subjects corrupted, turned the modrons' attentions inward, calling all survivors back to Regulus before sealing the borders. Few modrons had been seen in the century since, but inexplicably thousands have been spotted more recently. Primus is clearly up to something, but its motives remain mysterious.

There stands the Cathedral of Order and the Tower of Primus, demesne of the supreme one.

Modron Cathedral: This towering edifice seemingly defies all natural laws—it's much too slender for its height, and its interior is far vaster than its exterior suggests. Inside, stone walls support vaulted ceilings that spring into the sky, their upper reaches lost in shadows from below. Balconies on hundreds of floors ring the open space in the center, with thousands of modrons moving about on their errands. The central feature of the Cathedral is the Orrery, a mesmerizing latticework of gears that constantly spin and move about. Those knowledgeable in such things can recognize the Orrery as a model of the multiverse, incredibly detailed and infinitely complex.

Adventure Hook: Using a passkey provided by the Fraternity of Order, the adventurers are tasked with infiltrating the Modron Cathedral and retrieving the fabled Nexus Cube—a modron relic rumored to grant its bearer immunity against aberrant creatures.

Tower of Primus: A fantastically complex clockwork fortress, the Tower of Primus is a forty-one-story structure composed of rectangular blocks, each stacked slightly askew from the previous one to form a spiral hovering within the sky over Regulus Prime.



The skin of the tower shifts from black as night to bright and shiny, seemingly at the whim of its master. At the heart of the floating structure dwells the One and the Prime in its energy pool, connected to the collective through the Infinity Web (see the sidebar).

Adventure Hook: Information obtained from Shemeshka the Marauder in Sigil suggests that one of the seven pieces of the fabled Rod of Law is held in the Tower of Primus under the protection of Secundus Rex, Viceroy of Law.

Bestiary

Contrary to common wisdom, no two modrons are the same. A given rank has a set of responsibilities. Within each rank, individuals are tasked with distinct functions, requiring different attributes.

The following modrons illustrate the similarities and differences of this diverse race of beings. Statistics for other modrons can be found in "Creature Incarnations: Modrons," by Greg Bilsland and Bruce Cordell (*Dungeon* 186).

THE INFINITY WEB

The hub of the largest network of information in the cosmos, the Infinity Web is a mesh of mechanical sensors and fleshy strands accessible by Primus within the sanctum of its tower. Through this device the One and the Prime senses all modrons under its command, and through it Primus's orders are passed down through the complex chain of viceroys, governors, captains, and so on to reach every modron, no matter where it might be in the multiverse.

Tridrone Watcher

Given their enhanced vision and ability to levitate, tridrone watchers are commonly used as scouts. A watcher's three eyes are forever alert, its torso constantly rotating to better observe its surroundings. Watchers are also accomplished forward commanders, continually adjusting squad tactics as events unfold on the battlefield.

Tridrone Watcher **Level 8 Artillery**
Medium immortal animate, modron XP 350

HP 73; **Bloodied** 36 **Initiative** +9
AC 22, **Fortitude** 20, **Reflex** 20, **Will** 20 **Perception** +6
Speed 0, fly 6 (hover) Darkvision

Traits

All-Around Vision
Enemies can't gain combat advantage by flanking the watcher.

Implacable
An enemy cannot enter the tridrone's space by any means.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Javelin** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 2d6 + 4 damage.

⊗ **Pinning Javelin** (weapon) ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Ranged 20 (one or two creatures); +13 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d6 + 4 damage, and the target is immobilized (save ends).

✧ **Raking Whirlwind** ✦ **Recharge** when first bloodied
Attack: Close burst 1, or 2 if the watcher is bloodied (enemies in the burst); +13 vs. AC
Hit: 3d8 + 11 damage.
Miss: Half damage.

Move Actions

Modron Shift ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: The watcher ends any slowing or immobilizing effect on it and shifts up to 5 squares, ignoring difficult terrain.

Str 17 (+7) **Dex** 20 (+9) **Wis** 15 (+6)
Con 19 (+8) **Int** 12 (+5) **Cha** 13 (+5)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common
Equipment 9 javelins

Pentadrone Farstalker

Fanning out across the cosmos in small squads, pentadrone farstalkers are charged with hunting down and executing rogue modrons. Farstalkers are patient and introspective while on the hunt, pursuing their quarry methodically and with precision. In combat, they leap into melee with alacrity and savageness to catch opponents off guard.

Pentadrone Farstalker **Level 10 Skirmisher**
Medium immortal animate, modron XP 500

HP 105; **Bloodied** 52 **Initiative** +12
AC 24, **Fortitude** 22, **Reflex** 22, **Will** 22 **Perception** +7
Speed 7 Blindsight 10

Traits

All-Around Defense
The farstalker does not provoke opportunity attacks when it moves.

Implacable
An enemy cannot enter the farstalker's space by any means.

Standard Actions

⊕ **Steel Fist** ✦ **At-Will**
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +15 vs. AC
Hit: 2d10 + 7 damage.

Spinning Flurry of Blows ✦ **At-Will**
Effect: The farstalker shifts up to its speed and can make the following attack at any point during this movement.
Attack: Melee 1 (one creature); +13 vs. Reflex
Hit: 2d10 + 2 damage.

✧ **Psychosomatic Ether** (charm, psychic) ✦ **Encounter**
Attack: Close burst 2 (enemies in the burst); +13 vs. Will
Hit: 2d8 + 4 psychic damage, and the target is dazed and immobilized (save ends both).

Move Actions

Modron Shift ✦ **Encounter**
Effect: The farstalker ends any slowing or immobilizing effect on it and shifts up to 5 squares, ignoring difficult terrain.

Str 21 (+10) **Dex** 20 (+10) **Wis** 14 (+7)
Con 17 (+8) **Int** 14 (+7) **Cha** 14 (+7)
Alignment unaligned **Languages** Common

Nonaton Arbiter

Explorers from outside caught within the Accordant Expanse are typically intercepted and detained by pentadrone sentinels until the trespassers can be properly interrogated by a nonaton arbiter. Captives are then exiled or exterminated at the nonaton's discretion.

Though rare outside Mechanus, nonatons have been spotted with increasing frequency at the site of planar breaches opening to the Far Realm. A nonaton is always accompanied by a regiment of lesser modrons, overseeing them as they seal the breach and clean up any residual aberrant contamination.

A nonaton is formidable in close combat, lumbering into melee on three elephantine legs, slashing everything it passes with nine barbed, whiplike tendrils. Foes gazing into its large single eye are racked by nightmarish images that are incomprehensible by mortal minds.

Nonaton Arbiter **Level 11 Elite Brute (Leader)**
Large immortal animate, modron XP 1,200

HP 216; **Bloodied** 108 **Initiative** +7
AC 23, **Fortitude** 23, **Reflex** 23, **Will** 23 **Perception** +10
Speed 5 Blindsight 10
Saving Throws +2; **Action Points** 1

Traits

Implacable
An enemy cannot enter the arbiter's space by any means.

Precision of Order
The arbiter cannot be surprised, and it can swap any two creatures' positions in the initiative order at the beginning of an encounter.

Threatening Reach
The arbiter can make opportunity attacks against creatures within 2 squares of it.

Standard Actions

Barbed Tendrils ✦ At-Will
Attack: Melee 2 (one or two creatures); +16 vs. AC
Hit: 2d12 + 11 damage.

Nine-Tailed Spin ✦ Recharge ⚄ ⁞⁞
Attack: Close burst 2 (creatures in the burst); +14 vs. Fortitude
Hit: 4d8 + 9 damage, and the target falls prone.
Miss: Half damage.

Minor Actions

Discordant Gaze (charm) **✦ At-Will** (1/round)
Attack: Ranged 10 (one creature); +14 vs. Will
Hit: The target grants combat advantage (save ends).

Triggered Actions

From One Come Many ✦ Encounter
Trigger: The arbiter drops to 0 hit points.
Effect (No Action): The arbiter is destroyed, and three tridrone watchers appear in its former space or in unoccupied squares adjacent to that space. These tridrones act on the arbiter's initiative and are worth no experience points.

Skills Arcana +13, Dungeoneering +15

Str 16 (+8)	**Dex** 14 (+7)	**Wis** 20 (+10)
Con 23 (+11)	**Int** 17 (+8)	**Cha** 17 (+8)

Alignment unaligned **Languages** telepathy 20

About the Author

Origins and ENnie nominated game designer **Brian R. James** lives in Seattle with his wife, four children and a house full of geek paraphernalia. His game design credits include *The Grand History of the Realms™*, *Open Grave: Secrets of the Undead™*, *Demonomicon™*, *Monster Vault™: Threats to the Nentir Vale™*, and most recently *Menzoberranzan: City of Intrigue™*. Follow Brian online at twitter.com/brianrjames.

Additional Design
Christopher Perkins

Developers
Tanis O'Connor, Chris Sims

Editor
Jennifer Clarke Wilkes

Managing Editors
Kim Mohan, Christopher Perkins

Development and Editing Lead
Jeremy Crawford

Senior Producer
Christopher Perkins

Producers
Greg Bilsland, Stan!

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DARK·SUN CAMPAIGN SETTING

Eye on Dark Sun

Slaves of the Oba

By Rodney Thompson

Illustration by Christopher Burdett

The people of Gulg have been told a lie by their goddess: that the primal spirits of the natural world are evil, always seeking to destroy the city and its residents. This falsehood allows Lalali-Puy to control access to primal magic without worrying that a citizen might learn the truth—that the primal spirits are oppressed by the sorcerer-king and her templars, the nganga. By making the spirits out to be terrible bogeymen, the Oba keeps her populace too frightened to attempt to contact them, and she benefits from controlling the power of nature. Indeed, while the rest of Athas withers, Gulg is steeped in natural growth in part because Lalali-Puy does not destroy the primal spirits as the other sorcerer-kings do. Instead, she enslaves them.

Most of the primal spirits in and around Gulg are immortal and have long since been pressed into service by the Oba. How did she accomplish this feat? The secrets of the process have faded into legend, but the knowledgeable guardians of nature elsewhere in the world claim that only the presence of defiling magic made such a thing possible. Many believe that a defiler with the right knowledge—the knowledge possessed by Lalali-Puy—can burn the resistance out of the primal spirits, retaining their strength and magic while making them servile.

The process of dominating the primal spirits is extremely painful and transformative to them; the ones that serve the Oba and the nganga are twisted reflections of their former selves. Whereas most primal spirits take on physical forms that reflect the domain of their magic, the primal spirits of Gulg take shapes that are withered, desiccated, and covered in wounds and patches where their spectral flesh has been peeled away. When one of these spirits manifests physically, it looks like a half-dead, rotting creature.

Lalali-Puy has entrusted many of the nganga with the means to control the enslaved primal spirits. The witch doctors are secretive, so no one outside their elite ranks has any real knowledge of what this process entails, but rumors tell of dark rituals in shadowy corners of Gulg where witnesses are sacrificed to fuel the transfer of control from the Oba to the templars.

Templar Taskmasters

Not all the nganga control primal spirits, but those who do are exceptionally dangerous. The enslaved

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spirits enable the templars to work mysteriously; when a family vanishes in the middle of the night without a trace, the nganga are rightly blamed, but few people realize that the spirits of the earth make the crime possible. For those victims, their last moments are terrifying: the ground opens up beneath them, and twisted primal spirits claw their way to the surface, grasping with spectral claws to drag their prey down below, never to be seen or heard from again.

Many of the nganga are shamans and have bound the enslaved spirits to themselves so tightly that much of the nganga's power is derived from, and channeled through, these spirits. These templars almost never show themselves during the day, choosing to make the night their domain. Citizens of Gulg have reported seeing masked witch doctors loping through the darkest corners of the city, accompanied by strange, decrepit beasts. These nganga are forced to keep their primal spirits manifested much of the time to draw upon their power, which means residents might witness a templar walking alongside one of the very spirits that the Oba claims are out to destroy them all—an intimidating sight.

Only the sorcerer-king seems capable of maintaining full control over the enslaved spirits. On rare occasions, templars have been overwhelmed by the entities supposedly under their power. When a rebellious spirit breaks loose, it goes on a destructive rampage through the city, and several nganga band together to rein it in. During this time, the people of Gulg are reminded of the Oba's false warning: the primal spirits are destructive forces that would eradicate the city if allowed to go free.

Mad Spirits

Although most nganga think of the primal spirits as a body of similar, indistinct sources of power, nothing could be further from the truth. Before their enslavement, the primal spirits had domains over aspects of the natural world and developed their own temperaments and personalities. Subjugation has sapped much of their individuality, but the spirits remain unique entities, and some of them struggle against their shackles.

One of the most ancient primal spirits enslaved by the Oba is known as the Old Tree—the spirit of the agafari tree in which Lalali-Puy constructed Sunlight Home, her palace. When she used her magic to cause the tree to grow to an unnatural height, the effect on the spirit was similar. The Old Tree grew in size and power, and where it once lived within the agafari tree, now the tree is its prison. The Oba retains control of the spirit, and through it she manipulates the tree in which her palace sits. When she issues the right command, the Old Tree causes the agafari tree to reshape itself to suit her whims. Agents of the Veiled Alliance believe that if the spirit could be freed from the sorcerer-king's control, they could infiltrate Sunlight Home.

Red Clay is a primal spirit whose domain is the soil beneath Gulg. A high-ranking nganga holds Red Clay's leash, and it is believed that the templars use the spirit to travel throughout the city in secret. Red Clay can create and alter a network of tunnels beneath Gulg, allowing the nganga to move across the city undetected. In addition, at the command of the templar who controls Red Clay, the spirit can open a cavernous pit beneath an entire dagada, causing the group of huts to vanish below the ground in a matter of seconds. Red Clay is an unwilling servant in these acts, and some people say they hear a great moaning before such an event—the sound of the spirit's tears.

The Desert Squall is a dangerous, wild primal spirit that has rebelled against its nganga masters multiple times. Its domain is the rain that keeps Gulg verdant, and imprisonment is said to have driven the spirit mad. Many nganga would argue that the Desert Squall cannot be tamed; so far, it has slain three templars and was indirectly responsible for the death of a fourth (the Oba had a templar killed as punishment for letting the spirit break its bonds). Lalali-Puy places great value in the Desert Squall because it can be commanded to create rainstorms to water the forests of Gulg while other city-states wither under the crimson sun.

Primal Characters

In a Dark Sun® campaign, players who choose to play primal characters (such as druids, shamans, wardens, and others with the primal guardian theme) might find Gulg to be an attractive home. The city gives the Dungeon Master a great chance to show how far Athas has decayed under the rule of the sorcerer-kings. Since most players of primal characters will see themselves as guardians or defenders of nature, the appearance of twisted primal spirits should help to drive home the thorough corruption caused by defiling magic.

When a player character from Gulg uses a primal power, the DM can describe the effects in such a way as to reinforce the debasement of the primal spirits. To underscore the enslavement of these spirits, describe the magic being used as "wrenching itself free" of the character or "prying itself loose" from a totem or weapon. Primal effects that create plant life should create plants that are desiccated and withering, perhaps spotted with disease. When characters conjure bursts of energy, describe the energy as being tainted or sputtering, as though it struggled to come into existence.

For players of shaman characters from Gulg, the DM should describe their spirit companions as twisted, wounded-looking creatures. When a shaman character is created, the DM can work with the player to determine the nature of his or her shaman's relationship with the spirit companion. If the character has bonded amiably with the spirit, over the course of several levels the description of the spirit should slowly change until the companion is restored to its

vibrant, healthy form, reflecting the fact that as the shaman grows in power, so too does the primal spirit. On the other hand, if the player wants the primal spirit to remain enslaved, the companion keeps its twisted, wounded form and might rebel against the shaman at an inopportune time.

When a warden or druid character uses primal magic from Gulg to shapeshift into another form, the DM can describe that form as looking wounded and decayed. Doing so reinforces the idea that the primal magic generated by the enslaved spirits is tainted by their mistreatment at the hands of the Oba, and it gives the player characters a more personal stake in freeing the spirits from their oppression.

About the Author

Rodney Thompson, an advanced designer for Dungeons & Dragons® at Wizards of the Coast, is originally from Chattanooga, Tennessee. His credits for the D&D® game include the *Dark Sun Campaign Setting* and the *Dark Sun Creature Catalog*™, *Monster Vault*™, *Player's Option: Heroes of the Feywild*™, and *Lords of Waterdeep*™.

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Eye on Eberron

The Vale of the Inner Sun

By Keith Baker

Illustration by Christopher Burdett

Legends say that reality was formed by the three progenitor dragons: Khyber, Siberys, and Eberron. According to the most popular myth, Khyber treacherously slew Siberys and tore him to pieces. Eberron caught Khyber in her coils and trapped her. Eberron became the world itself, and gave birth to all natural things; while Khyber became the underworld, a source of horrors and aberrations.

Collectively, the Cults of the Dragon Below are anything but monolithic. Creeds vary wildly from one group to another, and cults spring up spontaneously; sometimes a madman has a vision that infects the minds of those around him. A few common threads of thought, however, appear in similar forms across cult lines. One shared precept is that the world is an imperfect place. Khyber sought to perfect it—to eliminate pain, suffering, death and all other woes—but the other dragons turned on her, and when Eberron couldn't defeat Khyber, she trapped her.

The second element of this credo concerns the realm of the Inner Sun. It is the belief that a paradise exists within Khyber, a place where people can escape the suffering of everyday life. Most of the cults that subscribe to this belief consider the Vale of the Inner Sun to be a place that can be reached only after death, often coupled with the requirement that one must earn passage to the vale by spilling the blood of worthy enemies. This perceived duty has been the motivation behind the acts of many murderers and vicious Marcher clans.

Through the millennia, there have always been those who maintain that the Vale of the Inner Sun is a physical place—that if you explore Khyber thoroughly, it's a place that can be found. And they're right. The Inner Sun is waiting within Eberron. But those who feel its light on their skin are never the same again.

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Traveling the Vale

Walk through the typical cave, and you'll find what you expect to find: slick rock, stalagmites and stalactites, molds and insects. But there is more to Khyber than mundane matter. The proper passage in Khyber can take you to the Abyss, or to the furnaces of Fernia. The Vale of the Inner Sun is a similar place, a pocket of space loosely connected to the material world. The heart of the vale is only about a hundred miles in diameter, but it's possible that the entire place is larger than Khorvaire.

The material laws of Eberron do not apply here. There are islands of iridescent stone floating in the air, birds made of razors whose songs draw blood, rivers of cold fire, and far stranger things. Above it all hangs the Inner Sun: a vast orb of shifting colors, dimmer than the sun of Eberron, yet bright enough to see by. The Inner Sun does not move, and there is no night in this place. Instead, the passing hours are marked by the colors of the sun as it shifts through all the hues of the spectrum and some not seen in the natural world. The people of this place have learned to predict the changes, so they can plan with each other to meet at certain color-times. However, these patterns are quite complex, and it takes newcomers days or weeks to learn them.

The flora and fauna of the Inner Sun can be dangerous to those who don't know how to interact with it. Many violent aberrations lurk in the shadowed canyons along the edge of the vale. The blood-red waters of the central river drive anyone who drinks from it into a temporary homicidal rage. However, experience allows one to overcome these threats. Someone who has lived in the vale knows how to mix the herbs that make the raging waters safe to drink, how to chase off the razor songbirds, and that the creatures that live in the shadows can't bear the light of the sun.

Those who inhabit the villages of the vale consider their home to be a paradise. It's a place of strange wonders and a danger to the uninitiated, but not instantly lethal. For some visitors, the people who live in the villages might be more of a threat than the beasts in the shadows.

The Light of the Inner Sun

The light of the Inner Sun affects all those who enter the vale. Any natural creature that remains in the vale is eventually transformed. This change, when completed, has the following effects.

- The creature's origin changes from natural to aberrant.
- The creature no longer ages and cannot die of old age.
- The creature is immune to disease.
- The creature does not need to eat or drink and cannot die of thirst or starvation.
- The creature is not able to sire or give birth to children.

The transformation also affects an individual's appearance. One's teeth might fall out, and its gums become as hard as a beak. A creature's skin can become tough and leathery, or iridescent and oily. Eyes can shrivel, or ears atrophy. Typically these changes are only cosmetic. However, at the DM's discretion, a change could carry a mechanical effect; as dolgaunts and grimlocks have done, a creature that loses its sight to the Inner Sun could develop another sense to compensate. For the most part, however, the physical changes mark the creature as an aberration but don't actually change its abilities.

The change is completed after a number of days equal to a character's Constitution score. This is an ongoing process that becomes irrevocable when the creature's origin changes, but the physical transformation begins within the first few days. A Remove Affliction ritual or one week spent outside the vale will remove one day from the creature's accumulated time.

The light of the Inner Sun is a life-giving force. While in the vale, creatures receive a +5 bonus to any check made to resist the effects of a disease and a +2 bonus to death saving throws, and can spend a healing surge on a death saving throw result of 19–20. However, the light of the sun changes as it heals; any day in which a character improves the condition of a disease or recovers from dying counts as two days for the purpose of finishing the transformation process. Once a creature has been fully transformed, only an eldritch machine or the intervention of a deity can reverse the process.

Inhabitants of the Vale

The Vale of the Inner Sun is loosely connected to Eberron. The passages that link it to the surface world shift on a regular basis, due to both tectonic activity and mystical forces. A rift that once led from the vale to a jungle in Aerenal now touches the King's Forest in Breland. Another passage fluctuates between the Mror Holds and the Shadow Marches, though the exact location within these places is never the same.

Over the years, a number of groups have settled in the vale. Communities have formed around shared beliefs. Conflict has sprung up at times, but generally speaking, the people of the vale leave one another alone. Two of the largest communities are described here.

Shae Taral

This gleaming tower near the heart of the vale was founded by a deathless elf named Saerdun Taral. A brilliant wizard, Taral spent his life studying the mystical properties of Khyber, Eberron, and Siberys. As a member of the Undying Court, Saerdun became obsessed with the idea that Eberron was wounded in her battle with Khyber and is slowly dying. He drifted from the core of the court, creating his own cult of the Dragon Below from among the living members of his line and other elves drawn to his beliefs.

Saerdun is unquestionably mad, and his fellow councilors dismiss many of his most outrageous claims as exaggerations. He did, however, predict the Mourning decades before it came to pass, and he insists that the cataclysm was just the beginning of a wave of destruction. Is he correct? In his insanity, has he seen a true glimpse of the Prophecy? Taral is convinced that safety lies only in the bosom of Khyber and that transformation into an aberrant is a small price to pay for that security.

Shae Taral is formed from crystal columns that catch and refract the light of the Inner Sun. It has about a thousand inhabitants, which spend their days contemplating mysteries of the arcane and divine and singing hymns to Khyber. Strange as their ways are, the people of Shae Taral have amassed a great deal of information about the Mourning, including its effects, manifestations, and ways to potentially survive its hazards or reverse its effects on living creatures. The elves are convinced that Eberron is doomed, but perhaps a more rational sage could use their research and take it in a different direction. At the least, if a second Mourning is coming, the library of Shae Taral could reveal when and where it will occur.

The people of Shae Taral aren't automatically hostile to outsiders, but they are suspicious; many believe that folk from the surface carry the taint of the Mourning. However, a skilled diplomat could win passage into the Citadel of the Sun and possibly even gain an audience with Taral.

The Jaggeds

In the precise center of the Vale of the Inner Sun, a ring of enormous obsidian monoliths surrounds and looms over a crimson river. These spires, curved like vast claws or teeth, are known as the Jaggeds. The mutated orcs, humans, half-orcs, and dwarves that live in the caves along the Jaggeds were born in the Mror Holds and the Shadow Marches, but few of them have any real memories of their former lives. They are locked in what they consider a sacred battle, a test put to them by Khyber to harden them for a great conflict that is yet to come. The occupants of each jagged spire fight against the others, but the battle is a carefully organized ritual; enemies that fall are spared, and some of the warriors have been fighting these daily battles for hundreds of years.

The people of the Jaggeds are ambivalent toward the elves of Shae Taral, but most will greet other strangers with homicidal fury, convinced that the intruders are the vanguard of the force they have been preparing to fight. Bands of raiders from the Jaggeds often roam the vale, looking for challenges and hunting the most dangerous beasts of the region.

Transient Villages

Shae Taral and the Jaggeds are permanent enclaves, but new communities rise as outsiders are drawn to the Inner Sun. Often these are people from the surface, cults of a few dozen members following a vision. However, other creatures feel the draw of the Inner Sun, and grimlocks, dolgrims, derro, and other denizens of the darkness often make their way into the vale. Such visitors usually don't play well with others, and between the dangers of the region and conflict with villagers, they generally don't last long.

Adventure Ideas

The Inner Sun can serve as an exotic location to explore, or it can be a direct threat that must be dealt with. Because many passages to the vale constantly shift, a new connection can open up anywhere that serves the needs of your story. Consider the following ideas.

- The inhabitants of the vale rely on new recruits to replace or increase their numbers. Raiders emerge from the spires of the Jaggeds occasionally to pillage surface communities, killing any who can't fight and kidnapping those that show spirit. These victims are brainwashed until the tenets of the spire are ingrained in them. In contrast, the once-elves of Shae Taral might perform targeted kidnappings on the most gifted members of a surface community, or send a prophet to spread their faith, attempting to lure people below of their own free will. As such, adventurers could encounter violent aberrant raiders; could be asked to investigate kidnappings; or could be confronted by a masked preacher warning of a second Mourning and promising safety to those who will follow him.
- The Vale of the Inner Sun is an alien landscape. It contains herbs and plants that can't be found anywhere else, along with vast quantities of Khyber dragonshards charged with the light of the Inner Sun. The occupants of Shae Taral have developed weapons and tools that incorporate Khyber shards, and adventurers could steal or trade for these things. What do the heroes desire most: Wealth? Strange, new magic? Knowledge about the Mourning? All of these can be found in the Vale of the Inner Sun.
- The dwarves of Clan Noldrun disappeared more than four centuries ago. When the characters stumble into the Vale of the Inner Sun, they discover the clan's fate. The light of the Inner Sun has transformed the dwarves into derro, and they have

carved a kingdom into the walls of the canyons. A dwarf character who has Noldrun blood could find an ancestor still alive in the Vale . . . but is that mutated thing an ally or a monster?

- After a path to the Inner Sun opens up near New Cyre, a new cult of the Dragon Below rises among the Cyrans. A masked prophet urges his people to abandoned the doomed surface and start a new Galifar beneath the Inner Sun. Who will be willing to sacrifice their humanity for a new homeland, and what powers can they find in the depths: Could a terrifying new Cyre rise to avenge the old?

About the Author

Keith Baker is the creator of the Eberron campaign setting and designer of the card game *Gloom*. Recently he's taken to sitting under his desk and saying that he won't come out "until they solve the Mourning."

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FORGOTTEN REALMS®

ED GREENWOOD'S
Eye on the Realms

The Lost Dragon of Waterdeep

By Ed Greenwood

Illustration by Zoltan Boros

Word has spread across the City of Splendors of what transpired at a revel hosted by a noble lord of Waterdeep. A guest in a back room was seen talking to a painting of a long-dead noble—and the painting *answered* him! Old rumors have been revived that describe how a dragon that is trapped in a painting can be compelled to answer a question put to it by someone who touches the canvas and utters a word that appears somewhere in the painted scene. The wyrm, 'tis said, answers truthfully but seeks to manipulate its questioners to procure and assemble certain items. Perhaps these items can free the dragon from the painting, or perhaps they are needed to further a darker purpose.

Lady Eagleshield's Revel

Once every four years, on the sixth night of Flamerule, Lord Narrovan Eagleshield holds a revel in honor of his long-dead wife Embrelle.[1] This celebration is in accordance with her written wishes, set down after an earlier and unrelated brush she had with severe fever. It has become a relaxed, warm occasion much valued by the nobles who are friendly with the Eagleshields (which are most of Waterdeep's highborn, because the Eagleshields are neither particularly wealthy nor "prominent and dominant"[2]). Lord Narrovan's four daughters are beautiful and charming hostesses, the lord himself loves listening to even the most long-winded jokes and stories, and the food served is always flavorful, easy-to-eat "comfort fare."

The Eagleshield city mansion, Highroost, has replaced the family's cold and drafty soaring stone villa on the same site. It is a rug-strewn, fireplace-studded, cozy (and seemingly endless) sequence of low-ceilinged rooms. Only the upper-floor back rooms, which lie along the north wall, have high ceilings. Thus, Highroost has few large, echoing feast-halls and rooms of state, but it has plenty of smaller, more relaxing chambers in which revelers can wander—and get lost. During a typical Lady Eagleshield's Revel, Highroost is full of nobles at their ease, chatting, playing board and card games, and eating and drinking from early evening until around

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highsun (noon) the next day. Grand speeches are not heard and arguments are few, because all those present let down their guard and eat as much as they can stomach.

At the most recent of these revels, some guests happened upon an extraordinary thing, and word has spread of what they saw. It seems that a certain guest, the younger Lord Tarm (that is, Lord Elevur Tarm, heir of the house[3]), was seen conversing with a painting on the wall in one of the back rooms.

The painting is a large one, about the size of a grand interior door in Highroost, or the top of a table meant to seat six large diners comfortably. It is canvas stretched over board (oiled duskwood panels, joined with pegs), sits in an ornate gilt frame, and is rather dark (and thanks to years of dust and soot from hearth fires and candles, it is even darker at present).

The scene the painting depicts "with sharp lifelikeness"[4] is an overgrown wooded garden with vine-cloaked stone statuary being visited by four young, handsome humans—two nobles, or at least expensively dressed men with rapiers at their belts, and two women in gowns. All four are looking up at a towering statue of a sleekly curved dragon that's sitting, jaws open, wings folded tightly around itself, and staring straight out of the painting at the viewer.

All the observers at the revel swear that Lord Tarm spoke to the painting and it replied, several times. There are some minor variances in what they heard, but the conversation is generally agreed to have run something like this:

Painting: No, I swear I am no monster. I've never had claws or great fangs, and I don't eat people—the very thought of it revolts me! I am just . . . lonely. I want to talk with folk, hear their dreams and doings and plans. I want to be touched.

Lord Tarm: Touched? Literally?

Painting: Sometimes. The talking, the companionship is more to me, though. I'm not going to pounce on someone who touches me. I have nothing to pounce *with*. Believe me. Please believe me, Lord Tarm.

Lord Tarm: Oh, I want to do so, yet I cannot be other than what I was raised to be. And what I was raised to be is . . . suspicious. You understand, I trust.

Painting: I do. Oh, I do. I am of Waterdeep myself, after all. And I am no dragon—I'm merely painted as one.

At this point, one of the onlookers burst out laughing, seeing the painting's latest utterance as an amusing ploy to lure humans within reach of it, and the conversation ended abruptly. Lord Tarm turned to regard the eavesdroppers, wearing an expression of annoyance. He then abruptly departed the room, brushing past them, and when pursued and questioned, he left Highroost and the revel entirely.

The painting fell silent, and the dragon made no reply to the eavesdroppers and the other revelers they excitedly brought to see it. They observed no change in its rather dark and dusty scene, and eventually most of the partygoers lost interest, though for some time individual guests wandered into the upper back parlor to gaze at the canvas curiously. The dragon spoke to a few of them who came alone, but it fell silent again whenever a second or third person arrived or was called in by a friend.

During the revel, none said anything about this incident to Lord Eagleshield, but afterward, word of the talking painting spread rapidly, and many questions have been asked of him and Lord Tarm ever since. Both of them refuse to discuss the matter, sharply reminding questioners that "insolent prying brings its own reward—and it is a dark one" (Lord Eagleshield) and "well-bred persons respect privacy, and this is a private matter" (Lord Tarm).

Yet interest in the talking painting remains high, and gossip rages. Many broadsheet writers have recalled—and written of—old Waterdhavian legends of the Lost Dragon of Waterdeep, a wyrm trapped in a painting that can be compelled to answer questions. Could this be the very same item that hangs in Lord Eagleshield's dusty parlor?

Legends of the Lost Dragon

As with almost all old legends, accounts of the Lost Dragon of Waterdeep vary in specifics. Some say the creature is trapped in a painting, but other tales have it trapped in a chair, a brazier, or even a chamber pot. Some tales name the dragon as Braroar, and others call it Skyrinshrankh. Some say it is a huge white dragon, others describe it as a blue wyrm, and still others insist it is of a unique or rare sort.

All the stories agree that the dragon, while confined, can still speak, and it is under a magical compulsion to truthfully answer a question put to it by someone who touches its physical prison and utters a word that appears unobtrusively on that prison (for example, somewhere in the painted scene or graven on the underside of the chair, brazier, or pot). Further, tales state that the dragon can see and hear keenly out of the front of the painting (or the top or front of the item, or perhaps in all directions from every surface of the item).

The Lost Dragon answers questions truthfully but not necessarily fully, and it seeks to manipulate questioners to perform certain tasks, which almost always involve bringing particular small items to the creature so that it can feel them. In all the accounts, the trapped entity wants the items touched to it and held against it. The desired objects vary from tale to tale but have included feathers, broad leaves of plants, flowers, tresses of hair, small smooth stones, and glass eyes.

Many rumors speculate darkly on why the painting craves the touch of these items. Is the dragon attempting to use clumsy magic to burst out of its prison, or is it hatching a more sinister scheme? Perhaps the painting is part of an unfinished work, forever compelled to recruit others to complete it—or

perhaps, once completed, it will doom Waterdeep by dissolving the mighty wards that keep the city from collapsing into Undermountain, or . . . well, the legend has so many "or" elements that no one can agree on anything.

Stories tell of young Waterdhavians who made their fortunes because they went looking for treasure where the dragon told them to search, but in at least one account, the imprisoned creature sent an unwitting questioner to a cruel doom. Some say the dragon sends people it likes to retrieve hidden magic items, and it sends those it dislikes on dangerous chases after nothing.

Inevitably, word of the conversation overheard at the Eagleshield revel reached the Watchful Order of Magists & Protectors (Waterdeep's guild of wizards), whose reaction was swift and dismissive. Guild Speaker[5] Amgarath Beltront, a magist of graying years, says there is indeed a dragon long imprisoned in a Waterdhavian painting, about which "many tales—true and otherwise—have been told." He adds, however, that Lord Eagleshield's work of art can't be the one from the legend, because the true painting, still with its dragon, hangs in a private back chamber of Piergeiron's Palace, out of public reach.[6]

Not a Dragon at All?

Other Waterdhavians have had various reactions to the news of what occurred at the revel. Some priests have claimed the dragon to be the voice of this or that deity—either the god speaking directly through the painting, or a holy servitor speaking words of divine guidance on behalf of the deity.

Not to be outdone, Waterdhavian sages have identified the painting as speaking with the voice of the legendary Khelben "Blackstaff" Arunsun; the elder beholder and one-time local crime lord Xandulzrithral (popularly known as Xanathar); the missing noble Lord Grimmun Kothont, widely deemed insane, who for years has used a *ring of invisibility* to wander the city and spy on its inhabitants while avoiding his kin (whom he detests)[7]; or the current beholder lord, Xlorothxrau (better known as "Lothjaws").[8]

Elaerla Raelingdorn, a sage with expertise in the recent social history of Castle Ward, has a different belief. Raelingdorn—a stout, plain lady of middling age who loves cheeses of all sorts and cookery involving cheeses and exotic sauces—insists that the painting is the prison not of a dragon but of Moaront Ghelmer, a Waterdhavian painter who disappeared about thirty years ago.

According to her—and to two no less august personages than the loudly flamboyant and very rich Waterdhavian art dealer Melaroar Duthking and the Sage of Shadowdale Elminster Aumar—Ghelmer has become undead. The details of his transformation aren't certain, though several rumors hint at a curse or a magic trap arranged by a furious parent of a young noble lady whom Ghelmer had seduced. (Before he disappeared, Ghelmer was the dashing lover of many highborn Waterdhavian ladies, young and old, and he delighted in playing pranks and being the center of—usually outraged—attention.)

Raelingdorn warns that Ghelmer continues to try to manipulate others despite being trapped in the painting. A sly, fell sentience, he wants youthful humans to touch the canvas he inhabits so that he can feed on their bright, glowing life force.

According to Elminster, Ghelmer can emerge as a specter, with all the powers and properties of such, whenever he desires but does so only if his painting is attacked. In addition, Elminster explains, Ghelmer can enter other painted scenes of the right sort—those that had human blood mixed into their paints, either deliberately or due to a minor accident befalling the painter. Elminster believes that Ghelmer knows of at least four other paintings in the city in which he can hide.

In life, Moaront Ghelmer was a vain, restless man who hungered for acceptance and admiration. His own paintings were large, bold canvases of purple and pink beasts superimposed on fairly accomplished portraits of real Waterdhavians (usually beautiful women). In undeath, Ghelmer seeks to entice youthful, vigorous adventurers to visit him or bring others for him to drain. (He is gentle rather than greedy, taking only 1 hit point per night and waiting a month or more for his next feeding.)

In exchange for bringing youthful "friends" for him to drain, Ghelmer will reveal what he knows about various old treasures hidden in Waterdeep. As the former lover of many highborn Waterdhavian ladies, he knows where necklaces, pectorals, and other jewels were stashed out of spite, fear, or a wish to keep them from being seized by an angry parent.

As long as people don't touch the talking Eagleshield painting—or trust everything it says—Elminster recommends that the bored or restless pay it a visit. "He's a fine talker," El comments, "and knows much. He also serves admirably as a warning that not all paintings are mere wall adornments."

Notes

1. Embrelle died of sudden, severe, and entirely unintentional food poisoning—or, more precisely, the violent reaction in her innards of the combination of three items: roasted onsler eel, the yellow sweet and spicy wine of Calimshan known as tharakh (camel blood-and-lemon wine, so named because its grapes are fermented in a vat of blood-tainted lemon juice), and tonthur-nut sauce (which, unknown to most, contains wyvern blood). If the right—or rather, *wrong*—proportions of these three otherwise harmless and nourishing edibles are ingested at the same time, the result is a sudden melting of internal organs, an effect spread rapidly throughout the body by the bloodstream. Unless magical healing is applied immediately, death is inevitable. Just

before Lady Eagleshield collapsed, her eyes glowed a bright purple-green. As a horrified servant put it, the doomed noblewoman's eyes "spat forth radiance, like flames that ignited nothing but flared into the air like tongues of a fast fire."

2. "Prominent and dominant" is the polite phrase adopted by Waterdeep's broadsheet press to refer to city residents—nobles, guildmasters, and wealthy citizens who want to become nobles—who are considered domineering or ruthless in trade. The true meaning of the well-mannered phrase is known to all.

3. Elevur is the son and heir of the Tarms, rather than the head of the family (Elevur's father, Lord Ralascar Tarm). The son, the father, and Ralascar's younger brother—Lonthlur Tarm, who has long been an invalid due to an adventuring mishap involving a huge beast that sought to bite his head off, an assault that "forever addled his wits and scarred his head horribly"—are all known as "Lord Tarm." Only Elevur customarily attends the Eagleshield revel. Lonthlur is never seen in public, though it's said that he often hoods and cloaks himself, then walks Dock Ward by night, where the damp harbor air briefly clears his wits.

4. This judgment is that of the local minstrel Sastram Vaerintel, who has seen the painting on several occasions and likes it, though he added that it seems eerily alive. Vaerintel has said that by "sharp lifelikeness," he means the painting is so realistic that it looks more like an event that is actually happening than a painted scene.

5. "Guild speaker" (which is merely a grand term for a spokesperson) has become an official Watchful Order title. There are multiple guild speakers at a time, each specializing in a particular field of expertise. Their existence does not imply that other guild members are forbidden from speaking. Rather, the office was instituted so that members who desired to remain silent on a matter could refer their questioners to the relevant guild speaker. Some magists have tried to use a guild speaker to avoid directly answering questions from the Watch, the Palace, or various Masked Lords, but they have met with a very cold reception in all cases. As one Masked Lord put it publicly, "Any Watchful Order magist is quite free to ignore a question from me or send me to a guild speaker for my answer—as long as that magist is willing to be exiled from the city, instantly and permanently, as the result of such utterly unacceptable behavior. No spell-hurler is above the law or any law keeper in *this* city."

6. According to Guild Speaker Beltront (an amiable but firm man readily recognized by his long, thin, double-pointed beard, which is white at both tips but retains some darkness in the middle, just below his mouth), the dragon painting is out of public reach for "very good reasons"—though he refuses to specify what those reasons are.

7. Lord Grimmun Kothont is considered missing because his family has not seen him for three summers, though ample evidence indicates that he still takes food from the Kothont kitchens and pantries, bathes in the heated plant-bower pools in the mansion cellar, and dresses himself from his extensive wardrobe. His three daughters claim that he sits in on private moments they try to have with suitors and friends visiting the house, and that he also follows when they go elsewhere in the city. Many people who have attended Kothont-hosted feasts and revels are sure that Lord Grimmun is present, though they can't see him. (He makes remarks, takes food from plates, sips from goblets, and at least once has embraced a beautiful female guest, to her astonishment and alarm.) Lord Grimmun is the head of his house, but he refuses to show himself, comment, or sign documents when his wife Alaeya or his daughters try to conduct family business. It's not clear why he withdrew from contact with his family, but before his disappearance into habitual invisibility, he seemed increasingly angry at their ways (high public profiles, freely shared opinions, friends of "ill repute," and lavish spending on the latest fashions) and their refusal to obey his demands, large and small. The unseen Lord Grimmun is thought to have shoved one of his daughter's lovers down a flight of stairs recently, injuring the young man slightly.

8. The habitual whereabouts of "Lothjaws" are unknown. This sleek, chestnut-brown, red-eyed beholder is known to possess a magic item that enables it to take other shapes for short periods. It often poses as a human but keeps to rooftops or other vantage points where it can't be surrounded easily, taken from behind, or confined. Lothjaws is rising to dominate criminal activities in South Ward by manipulating the heads of small gangs and cabals—and, rumors insist, more than one guildmaster. The beholder seems obsessed with learning the identities of the Masked Lords of Waterdeep, though whether the purpose is to kill them or gain some hold over them isn't clear.

About the Author

Ed Greenwood is the man who unleashed the Forgotten Realms® setting on an unsuspecting world. He works in libraries, and he writes fantasy, science fiction, horror, mystery, and romance stories (sometimes all in the same novel), but he is happiest when churning out Realmslore, Realmslore, and more Realmslore. He still has a few rooms in his house in which he has space left to pile up papers.

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